

Young Klondike

STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

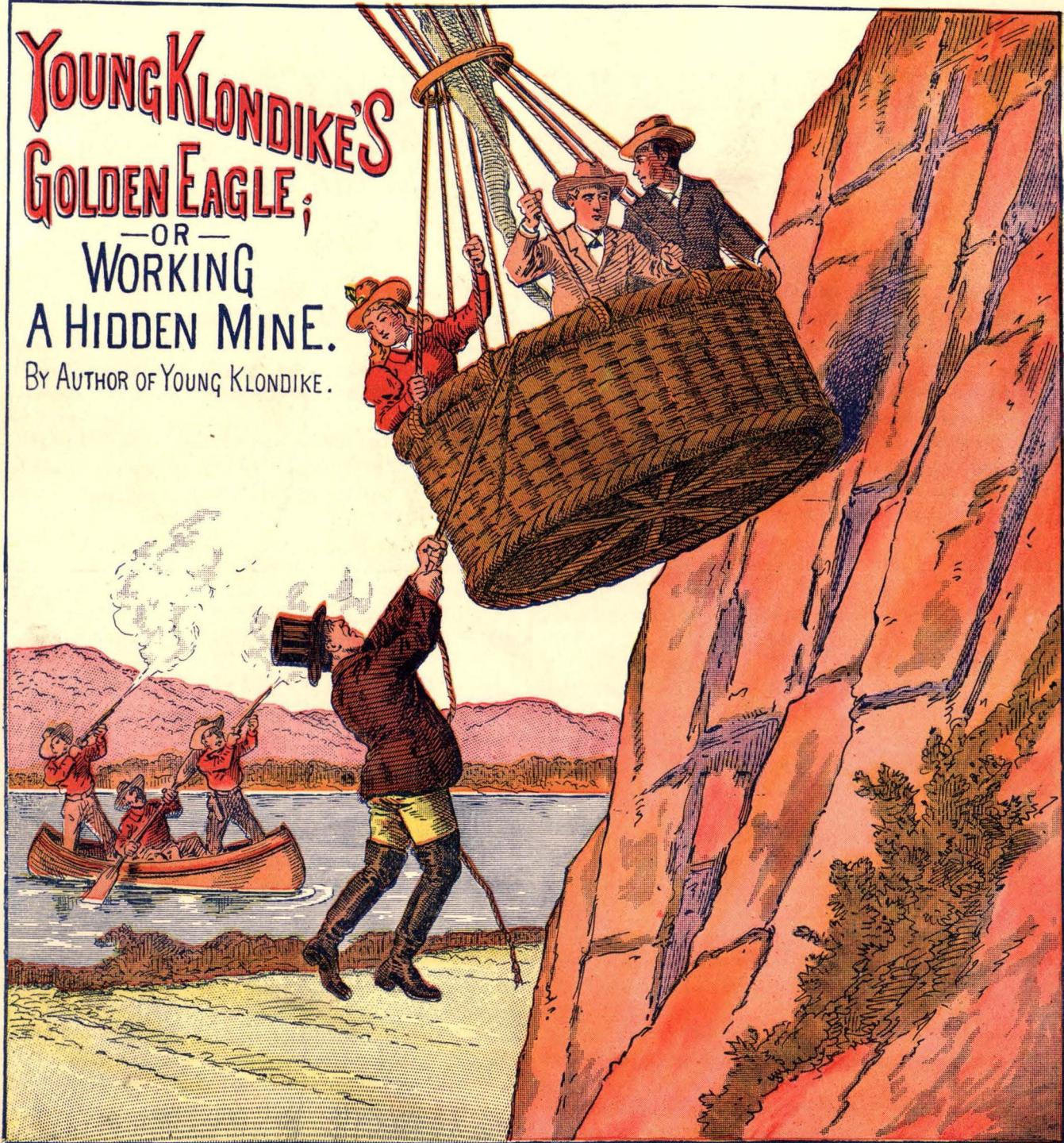
No. 13.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 31. 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG KLONDIKE'S GOLDEN EAGLE; —OR— WORKING A HIDDEN MINE.

By AUTHOR OF YOUNG KLONDIKE.



“Pull me in! Pull me in!” bawled the Unknown. “By the Jumping Jeremiah, it’s all up with me if you don’t.” At the same instant the balloon struck the cliff and bounded back, and the crack of three rifles was heard in the direction of the boat.

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Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, March 15, 1898. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1898, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, 29 West 26th Street, New York.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO WANTED THE EARTH.

THE tree fell over the cliff with a crash and joined the pile in the valley below.

Dick Luckey, the young man who cut it down, leaned on his ax and listened until the echo of its crash died away.

"Hello, Ned!" he shouted down over the cliffs. "Hello! How many more do you want? I'm tired of wood chopping. Have I got to do the act again?"

"We don't want any more," was the reply shouted back from the valley. "We've got enough here to run the house up with—you can come down now."

Dick looked down over the cliff and saw his partner, Ned Golden, better known in the diggings as Young Klondike, standing with a red-shirted miner near the creek.

The valley was the wildest, gloomiest spot imaginable. On the north and west it was shut in by towering cliffs, over which the melting snow sends volumes of water in summer as it rushes down from the mountains above. These mountains seemed to climb Heavenward until the eye wearied in following them, and all were clothed in eternal snow and ice.

This wild, inhospitable spot was located far up the Klondike river, much further up than the location of any claims.

Few had penetrated there and few would have cared to do so, even with a prospect of a rich find.

But Golden & Luckey, the enterprising millionaire boy firm of the Klondike, known as hustlers from one end of the region to the other, were ever ready to take up any new lead, no matter how remote and dangerous the location might be, always providing there was a fair show of striking a rich deposit of gold.

Dick climbed down and joined his partner and Jerry Quilter, as the red-shirted miner was called.

Golden & Luckey had been working a week here on Moose Creek with Jerry Quilter to help them.

They had purchased a large tract of land in this new region and had now set about developing it in their usual enterprising way.

Now they were expecting the arrival of the rest of the firm of Golden & Luckey, and when Dick got down into the valley and they heard the sound of a steamer coming up the Klondike, they naturally thought it was the Mic-Mac, their own steamer, which was to bring up their friends from Dawson City.

Consequently they were rather disappointed at seeing the old "Belle of Yukon" loaded down with a hard-looking lot of Klondikers, evidently bound further up the river on the hunt for gold.

"Hello, Young Klondike!" sung out Captain Dodson, who knew the boys perfectly well.

"Hello!" shouted Ned.

"So you are up here, are you? Blamed if I knew what had become of you. They've been wondering down at Dawson for the last ten days where you had gone."

"We are right here," replied Ned. "Say, cap, seen anything of the Mic-Mac coming up?"

"She hadn't started when we left Dawson," was the reply. "I saw your friend Mr. What's-his-name flying round town. Him with the plug hat and the big boots. By the way, what is his name?"

"Blest if I'll ever tell you!" Ned Golden called back.

"Pshaw! You know who I mean well enough. The little old fellow who always travels about with you."

"Name's Mr. Zed," was the reply, and yet the first answer had been the correct one.

The little man alluded to was actually one of the

firm of Golden and Luckey, and yet it was also a fact that his partners did not know his name, the "why" of which will be explained later; we cannot stop now to do it, for we must tell how the "Professor" came ashore and what happened after he got there; these are highly interesting matters, as will be seen.

"Say, Young Klondike, I've got a gent here what wants to make your acquaintance," called out the captain. "He's a learned professor from McGill College in Montreal, come out here to get points on the Klondike. He'd like to stop a week in your camp. We'll pick him up on our return trip."

"I've no objection!" called Ned. "He can come ashore and stop as long as he wants to. Where are you bound?"

"Oh, we are going up as far as Brown's Creek."

"Things seem to be opening up here in lively style. Twice I've gone further up the Klondike than any one else, but it seems as if I couldn't get far enough to be the furthest up."

"You'll have to get to the end of creation to do that, I reckon," laughed the captain. "Prospectors are pouring into Dawson City by thousands. This thing has only begun."

"Let the good work go on, and let the professor come ashore!" called Ned. "I can send out a boat for him if you wish."

"Wish you would," replied the captain. "I want to hustle right along."

Ned then gave the order for Jerry Quilter to pull out to the Belle, and he and Dick returned to their occupation of tumbling over the logs.

The sight of a steamer load of gold hunters was nothing novel to them.

The prospectors, on the contrary, all crowded to the rail, listing the steamer badly.

Everyone had heard of the famous Young Klondike and his partner, Dick Luckey, and all were curious to get a sight of the noted firm.

Meanwhile, a tall, slender man with spectacles climbed down from the deck of the steamer and entered the boat.

Immediately the Belle blew her whistle and steamed off up the Klondike.

The boys waved their hats as they departed, and the Klondikers responded with a rousing cheer.

Jerry pulled the professor ashore.

He was rather a Miss Nancy sort of person. There was a bundle of fancy shawls and rugs to come out of the boat, with Alpine-stocks and walking sticks thrust through the middle, besides which there was a dress suit case and a large leather grip and a leather hat box, and a lot of other things, all very absurd as an outfit for a Klondiker, come to hunt for gold.

Ned and Dick stood staring at the singular display.

"What in the world does the fellow expect to do with all those traps?" said Dick.

"Does he look for afternoon receptions and Pink teas up here I wonder?" chuckled Ned.

"However," he added, "he looks like a harmless

sort of crank, and we will receive him pleasantly. He can't do us any harm."

Meanwhile the professor was puffing up the steep bluff, dragging his belongings with him, for Jerry did not offer to help as he might have done if he had been more polite.

"Why don't you grade off this hill here a bit?" he called out. "I find it very difficult to ascend. It would not demand a heavy expenditure, either of time or money to make the summit easily accessible to all."

"Well, upon my word, that's cool," whispered Dick.

"Well, speak him fair," replied Ned. "He's evidently a crank, but civility costs nothing." Then he added aloud:

"I'll take your proposal into consideration, professor. As it is, we've just started in here."

"Exactly so," replied the stranger. "All in good time, young man. Bless me! where's the house?"

"House! What house?" demanded Ned.

"Why, the house I'm to stay in—your house, to be sure."

"That remains to be built," laughed Ned, pointing to the logs.

"To be built! What—what! Do you mean to tell me that I've got to sleep in a tent, or any dreadful thing like that?"

"Why, we haven't even got a tent yet," replied Ned. "It's warm weather now; we roll ourselves up in our blankets and sleep under those shelving rocks."

"Oh, bless my heart! I could never do anything like that—never! Stop the steamer and let me get out of this dreadful place at once!"

This was too much even for Ned Golden's good nature.

"Stop her by all means if you can!" he replied. "We don't want you here, boss. We can get along first-rate without you!"

Ned was half angry when he shouted at the top of his voice trying to attract the attention of someone on board the Belle of Yukon, but the steamer had now gone too far, and to stop her proved to be one of the impossibilities. So there was nothing for Ned to do but to cool down.

"You'll have to make the best of it," he said. "You are here and you can't get away. What you can expect up here in the gold diggings I'm sure I don't know."

"I see that you can't do any better for me than you say," replied the stranger. "Well, as you say, I shall have to make the best of it. I'm Professor Appledore, of McGill College, Montreal."

"Glad to see you, professor," said Ned, heartily. "I am Ned Golden, of New York, and this is my friend Dick Luckey, of the same place."

"Professor Appledore took out his note-book and proceeded to consult it."

"Oh, ah, yes! That is quite correct," he replied

with a drawl and a lisp. "You are the person commonly known as Young Klondike, if I don't mistake."

"That's me," laughed Ned.

"Yes; just so. I am here for the purpose of gathering statistics for our college. I came up to Dawson City on the steamer Triton from Port Townsend, by way of the Yukon river. I have not as yet had an opportunity to rough it much and I was in hope I should not have to do so. I understood that there was a house at Young Klondike's camp."

"Oh, drop on that," exclaimed Ned. "We've got several camps and half a dozen houses, but this happens to be a new diggings and there is none here."

"So much the worse for me. How long do you think I shall have to remain here before the steamer returns?"

"Oh, four or five days—perhaps a week," replied Ned, carelessly. "Better make yourself at home."

"A week! I could never stand it a week!" cried Professor Appledore, with a look of horror. "I should be dead if I had to sleep under those rocks for a week."

"Oh, well then, walk back to Dawson," replied Ned, out of all patience. "You want the earth, my good friend. You made a great mistake in ever coming to the Klondike. Come on Dick. We've got to go to work and get ready to build our house."

The boys then returned to their log rolling, leaving Professor Appledore standing with his hat box in one hand and his dress suit case in the other, looking as much out of place as a bull in a china shop, or red-shirted Klondikers in a Fifth avenue parlor.

It was strange that such a man should ever have come to the Klondike.

Really it was difficult to understand what sort of a place Professor Appledore expected to find away up here near the head waters of that world famous river where scarcely a white man had ever penetrated before.

CHAPTER II.

THE ACCIDENT ON THE RIDGE.

PROFESSOR APPLEDORE cooled down before the day was many hours older.

If the man was not possessed of the average amount of common sense, he at least had enough of it to show him that there was little to be gained by putting on so many airs and frills.

By the time the boys got through their work the professor was quite ready to join them at supper, and he ate his share of roast moose meat and drank several cups of Young Klondike's coffee, which he declared was first rate.

"Now then, Mr. Golden, I'd like to get a few statistics of you," he remarked, taking out his notebook. "That's what I came here for. Your name

and fame has reached us, even in Montreal, and we'd like to know who you are."

Ned laughed.

"Why, I ain't anybody in particular," he replied. "You see all there is of me right here."

"Just so; but I want to know something more about you, if you have no objection," said the professor. "What is your full name?"

"Ned Golden is near enough."

"Shall I put it down so?"

"If you like."

"Down it goes. Where are you from?"

"I'm from New York."

"Down that goes, and your partner, Mr. Dick Luckey. Shall I put him down the same?"

"If you want to—Dick is from New York, too."

"And I suppose you wish you were back there again," said the professor with a sickly smile.

"No, I don't wish anything of the sort," replied Dick. "I'm well satisfied here."

"Perhaps I should be if I were to remain here any length of time," continued the professor; "at present I find it very uncomfortable; but to return to this question of statistics; you are not the only members of the firm of Golden & Luckey, I understand?"

"No; there are two others."

"I have it in my note-book that one of these is a Miss Edith Welton; where is she from?"

"From San Francisco," replied Ned.

"Relative of yours?"

"No, only a friend," said Dick. "We met her on the journey to Juneau. The steamer on which she was happened to be wrecked, and my friend Ned Golden saved the young lady's life. She has been with us ever since."

"Exactly. I have heard something of all this. The fact is your story is well known in Canada and the States. I find by my notes that there is still another member of your firm. A man who poses as a detective, but I do not find that I have his name."

"Probably not," replied Ned, laughing heartily.

"Really I don't exactly see where the joke comes in," said the professor, looking puzzled. "Would you mind giving me his name?"

"I wouldn't mind at all if I knew it myself."

"Do you mean to tell me you don't know it?"

"I mean exactly that."

"How can that be possible? Isn't the man your partner?"

"That's what he is, but he happens to be peculiar, and he don't tell his name."

"Strange!"

"Very."

"And do you mean to tell me that you are actually in ignorance of the name of your own partner?"

"I mean to tell you exactly that, and I've told you so twice before. There is really no use in asking me again."

"Why, this is very remarkable. Is this Mr. Nobody really a detective?"

"That's what he claims to be, but we know very

little about him. If you want further particulars I shall have to refer you to the Unknown himself."

"Oh, that's what you call him then—the Unknown."

"Yes, that's what we call him."

"Can I see him?"

"Certainly you can when he comes here."

"Oh, he's not here now, then?"

"Certainly not. If he was, do you suppose he would remain away when there was any grub going? That shows you don't know the man at all."

"Well, of course I don't know him. If I did, I shouldn't be asking questions about him. I didn't know but he was off hunting or fishing, or prospecting, or something like that."

"No; he's gone down to Dawson City to buy a balloon," replied Ned, with another laugh.

"Young man, you are making game of me," replied Professor Appledore, jumping up in a huff. "I'm only asking for information, but I see that I am not likely to get it here."

And the professor walked off over the rocks with a great air of dignity, leaving the boys to themselves.

Although late in the evening it was still broad daylight, for in summertime on the Klondike the sun scarcely sets.

"That man makes me tired," said Ned. "By gracious, Dick, was there ever such a fool? I wish Captain Dodson had kept him on board the Belle."

"Oh, he's a harmless sort of crank," laughed Dick. "Of course you could scarcely wonder at his supposing you were making fun of him when you said the Unknown had gone to Dawson to buy a balloon."

"And yet it's the truth."

"Exactly; but how could he know it, and yet it ain't altogether the truth either, for Zed has not gone to buy a balloon, but to get one we have already bought."

Now here was a strange statement, and one which certainly demands explanation, but the boys did not stop to discuss the matter further just then.

"Hello!" cried Ned, suddenly, "he's going up the cliff! I don't know as I care to have him do that."

Professor Appledore had already ascended to the place where Dick cut down the trees and was now starting up a steep slope, which followed to its summit would take him to a ridge of rock far above them.

"He can't do any harm," said Ned.

"That depends. He may have a glass."

"Let him use it. What good will it do him? He can't get down to the gold."

"Let's go up after him and see what he does," said Dick.

To this Ned made no objection, and leaving Jerry Quilter to smoke his pipe, the boys started up the mountain after the Montreal man.

Professor Appledore saw them coming, but did not seem to be disposed to wait for them, and climbed on with more agility than one would have expected him to display.

At last he reached the top of the slope and passed

out of view. When the boys came up to him he stood there bareheaded, contemplating, perhaps, the most remarkable natural phenomenon ever discovered in the Klondike country, which must now be described.

Here was a narrow ridge separating the valley of the Klondike from another valley, a long narrow depression between the mountains of surprising depth.

Down to the bottom of this valley was certainly two thousand feet. Its bed was fully a thousand feet below that of the river. On the opposite side a vast wall of gray granite stood exposed, while on the side of the ridge, although somewhat broken, the condition of things was substantially the same.

At each end—and both were distinctly visible—the valley seemed to be closed, as in fact was the case, for as far as any white man was aware, there was no way of getting into the valley.

Rumor had it that Indians had succeeded in getting down to the bottom and getting up again, but these tales were not generally believed.

"Beautiful! Elegant! Magnificent! Splendid!" cried Professor Appledore, who seemed to have entirely recovered his temper now.

"It is rather remarkable, we think," replied Ned. "What do you make out of it, professor? How do you think it was formed?"

"Glacial action, sir—undoubtedly glacial action," was the prompt reply.

"Then you think that hole was scraped out by a glacier?"

"Of course I do. It could not possibly have been formed in any other way."

"Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Well, no, not exactly. No, I can't say I ever did; but I can judge better after I've been down to the bottom."

"Then you'll put off judging forever, for it is not likely you'll ever get there."

"How?"

"There's no 'how'; that's the trouble."

"Do you mean to imply that the inaccessibility of the cliffs prevent the penetration of the valley?"

"That's what I mean to say, although I'm not much on big words."

"Oh, ha, hum! Well, it may be as you say, but I doubt it—greatly doubt it, young man."

"And why?"

"Because there must always be an outlet to every valley."

"There's none to this, however."

"I should have to prove that to my own satisfaction before I accepted it."

"How are you going to prove it when you can't get down there?"

"Yet you expect to go down there, and that's why you came up here."

Ned stared.

"Hello! You ain't such a fool as you look!" he exclaimed.

"Ain't I?"

Professor Appledore picked up a stone and threw it down into the valley.

"Deep!" he chuckled. "Very deep."

"Do you mean that I am deep, or that you are deep or that the valley is deep?"

"Put it any way you please."

"You heard something in Dawson City. Your visit up here is not all accident."

"Perhaps not. I don't mind telling you what I heard."

"Tell it."

"Lend me your glass."

"Thank you, no."

"Ah, ha! Afraid! You don't care to have me discover the hidden mine."

"That's enough," said Ned. "I see you know all. So it has been talked about in Dawson that we've bought the celebrated Death Valley and are going to try to work the hidden mine?"

"Well, yes, it has been a matter of discussion."

"And who are you? What lay are you on?"

"Young Klondike, I don't understand your slang. I've stated the case as it is. I am just from Montreal, but that don't hinder me from having eyes and ears. I heard of the Death Valley claim, and I heard of you. Naturally I wanted to see both, and to see if the story that the nuggets lie strewn all over the ground in Death Valley is true."

"That's why you wanted to borrow my glass?"

"That's why, but no matter. I can use my own, only I happened to leave it down below, and it's a deuce of a climb up here."

"You can have mine," said Ned. "There's no mighty mystery about all this. Only thing was I didn't care to expose my business to a stranger more than I had to—that's all."

"My being a stranger to you is something that will soon be cured if I am going to remain here a week, but let me give you a word of advice, don't you try to go down into Death Valley by balloon."

Professor Appledore laughed. He seemed to think that he had said something very funny.

"Never you mind about that balloon," said Ned. "If you are going to stay here a week perhaps you'll find out what we intend to do. Here's the glass."

"Oh, ah, yes! Thank you. It looks like a good one. Now to see if the story I have heard about Death Valley is true; if the nuggets actually lie scattered all over the ground."

He adjusted the glass, and took a long look down into the valley.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Really, the situation has not been exaggerated a bit."

Ned smiled. "So you see them?" he asked.

"Yes, I see them."

"Remarkable, isn't it?"

"Not at all. At one time that valley was full of ice up to the level where we stand. When the ice melted there was a general washout all around, and the gold settled down into this valley. Having no chance to get away it remained there—that's all."

Professor Appledore handed back the glass, and Young Klondike took a long look himself.

What he saw he had seen many times before, but that made it none the less wonderful.

Golden nuggets lay strewn about the bottom of the valley in every direction.

Through the glass the majority seemed to be about as big as a hickory nut, some being larger, and a few very large.

Where so many big ones were there must also be smaller ones. Then besides the nuggets there was dust, of course.

If it was true that the valley had no outlet, here then was a hidden mine of enormous value.

Ned Golden had often heard of this place since his arrival at the Klondike.

Some time previous he and Dick came up the river and examined it. Being satisfied of its immense richness, they bought the mountain of a Montreal man, who had previously *located* the land, as it is called—that is, had taken possession of it under the Canadian mining law.

This party attempted by every way possible to penetrate into the hidden valley, but failed, and was glad to sell out his interest at a low figure, feeling sure that what he failed to do could be done by no one.

Young Klondike, however, thought differently. He had come here fully prepared to spend time and money in working this hidden mine, and determined not to fail.

The boys talked the matter over a while longer with Professor Appledore and then returned to the camp below.

They spent the night rolled up in their blankets under the rocks. Professor Appledore declared that they never slept a wink, and came to breakfast in anything but a pleasant frame of mind.

Young Klondike paid but little attention to his complaints.

"We can't do anything for you more than we have done," he said. "You didn't have to come ashore here, you know."

Secretly Ned was much annoyed. He heartily wished that the professor never had come ashore, for he did not relish the idea of this captious mining expert prowling around his claim.

All day the professor wandered about the mountain-side inspecting the hidden mine from different points of view.

Young Klondike did not like this at all, but he did not interfere with him. The building of the hut had begun, and Ned and Dick had enough to do to attend to that.

Hut building was an old business with Golden & Luckey, and with Jerry Quilter's help they made good headway.

By the end of that day the logs were all ready for framing, and by the next night the hut was up and the roof on.

Bunks still remained to be built and the doors to be

hung, not to mention several other odds and ends of work necessary to complete the job, but the work had already so far advanced that they could sleep in the hut, and it was just as well that it was so, for toward six o'clock it all clouded over and there was every evidence of a big storm being close at hand.

"Wonder where the professor is?" remarked Dick, when they quit work and sat down to supper.

"I saw him wandering about up on the ridge," replied Ned. "He seems to take particular pleasure in staring down at our hidden mine. I don't know what he expects to make out of it, I'm sure."

"I don't like that man, boss," said Jerry Quilter. "He's not such a fool as he looks. I tell you it's my opinion that he is up to some dodge or another—yes."

"I believe you," replied Ned. "I've thought so all day—in fact, ever since he came here, but what are we going to do about it? I don't see any chance of getting rid of him till the Belle of Yukon comes down the river again."

"There ain't any chance," added Dick. "We've just got to grin and bear it. He's a spy of some sort, you may be very sure."

"Give him a call, Jerry," said Ned, "we can't wait dinner for him anyhow."

Now Jerry Quilter had a voice like a foghorn, and he used it to the best advantage on this occasion. Its echo rang through the valley, coming back time after time until it died away in the distance.

Then presently they saw the professor come into view on the ridge from behind a big pile of rocks. He waved his hat and disappeared again.

"Huh! That's as much as to say that he'll come to dinner when he gets ready," said Dick. "Let's go ahead and feed."

Before dinner was over the wind began to blow from the northwest. Dark masses of clouds went scudding across the sky. It was evident that a big storm was close at hand.

"That man ought to come into camp," declared Dick. "It's dangerous for him to be caught up there on the ridge in the storm. The rocks will get so slippery after it has rained a bit that he'll break his neck coming down, sure."

"Let's go up after him," said Ned. "I'd like to see what he is about."

"I'm with you there," said Dick. "We ought to have known long ago."

They decided to start at once and were soon up on the ridge, but could see nothing of Professor Appledore, nor was there any answer to their shouts.

As they hurried along the ridge hoping to find him, Ned suddenly caught sight of a stout rope tied around one of the few trees which grew on the ridge, hanging down over the cliffs into the valley.

"Thunder! There's our rope!" he cried. "I wondered what had become of it. Well, upon my word, this is cool!"

"It's the professor trying to get down to the hidden mine!" exclaimed Dick. "That's the kind of

man he is, Ned. Steamer or no steamer, he ought to be run off the claim."

"Looks as if he'd succeeded in getting down," replied Ned, "and yet that's impossible. The rope ain't more than a hundred feet long, and—look! Look! There he is now!"

The rope began to shake, and in a moment Professor Appledore's head was seen coming up over the rocks.

"Come up out of that, confound you!" cried Ned. "What do you mean by doing a thing like that without asking our permission?"

"Hello! Is it you, boys?" called the professor. "Don't you fret about me! I'm all right. I—oh, Heavens! The rope is breaking!"

It was an awful sight! Awful to listen to his cry. For the rope, cut by its contact with the edge of the rocks, strained and parted.

As the cry rang out above the hidden valley, Professor Appledore dropped back out of sight and disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT OF THE BIG STORM.

FOR a moment Ned and Dick stood speechless with horror.

"Great Heavens! what a terrible thing!" Dick broke out at last.

"He's lost! There's no earthly help for him?" gasped Ned, and he ran forward to the tree from which the end of the rope hung dangling.

"Professor! Professor!" he shouted, but there was no answer save the howling of the wind.

Ned seized the rope and pulled it up. It had broken short off, and a new sense of horror came over the boy as he held the dangling end in his hand.

"It's all up with him, Dick."

"Up with him! I should say so! There ain't one chance in ten million that man's still alive."

And even the slight chance that Dick figured out vanished after a moment.

They shouted themselves hoarse, called and called until there seemed absolutely no use in calling any longer.

Then they returned to the camp, too much oppressed to say a word.

Professor Appledore had come upon them unexpectedly, and now he had left them under circumstances which seemed likely to cast a blight forever upon Young Klondike's new camp.

That night it rained as it only can rain in the Yukon country.

The wind howled and blew so hard that every now and then great rocks were blown over the cliff and came crashing down the slope.

The rain descended in one solid sheet, deluging everything, and causing Moose Creek to rise rapidly.

Soon it was on a level with the top of the bluff which Professor Appledore pretended to find so hard to climb.

"The hut will go next, boss," said Jerry Quilter. "I don't believe she can stand up against anything like this."

It was nearly dark by this time, being then almost midnight.

Jerry Quilter was wandering about the hut uneasily, but Ned and Dick sat just inside the doorway watching the water as it came creeping up over the edge of the bluff.

"Pshaw! I don't believe there's a bit of danger," said Ned. "The rain can't keep on this way long. There must be some let up when the sun goes down."

"There won't be no let up until morning," declared Jerry, with the air of a man who believed just what he said.

Pretty soon it grew dark, and true to Ned's prediction the rain did cease.

Moose Creek had now risen over the bluff, but there would have to be a still further rise before it came up to the hut.

Jerry Quilter had quit croaking and gone to sleep, and Ned, anxious to have a look at the Klondike and see how much that had risen, started down for the shore.

"Hold up and I'll go with you," said Dick. "I just want to put on my other coat."

"Come along when you get ready!" called back Young Klondike, and he hurried down to the high bank of the river, only a short distance away.

The Klondike had risen also, and was almost up to the level of its banks.

As Ned stood watching the hurrying water he suddenly felt the bank giving way beneath his feet.

"Heavens! A cave in!" he cried.

"Look out for yourself!" shouted Dick, who was hurrying toward the place. "There's a big crack here!"

Dick did not realize Ned's danger in the least.

Suddenly to his horror he saw a big section of the bank sink down out of sight, carrying Ned with it.

Young Klondike gave one sharp cry as he vanished, and then all was still.

Poor Dick almost fainted.

"Ned! Ned! Ned!" he cried, running to the newly-formed edge of the bank, entirely regardless of his own danger which was certainly great.

Here he could see the river sweeping at his feet, rushing on like a mill race to join the Yukon.

"Ned! Ned!" yelled Dick, and then he saw a hand raised above the water further down.

"I'm all right! Don't worry! I'll land somewhere!" Dick heard Young Klondike's strong, hearty voice shout back.

It was an immense relief to Dick. He knew Ned to be a splendid swimmer, and so long as he had not

been held under by the fallen mass of earth, he did not feel a bit afraid.

Nor was Ned afraid either. He had the utmost confidence in himself and his power of endurance.

But the water was icy cold and there was cramp to be thought of, and moreover it was quite impossible to think of landing until he had passed beyond the line of the bluffs, and that would not be for a mile or more.

Ned swam with the current and kept as cool inwardly as he was outwardly.

Just then the rain began again, and a rush of wind blew a dense cloud down into the valley, and it grew darker than ever.

Young Klondike found that it was no longer possible to see the bank; he was being whirled along in the middle of the stream.

"Come! This is going to be serious," thought Ned. "If I don't get out of this snap soon there's going to be trouble. Hello! What's that?"

It was nothing less than the hoarse whistle of a steamer, but whether it was coming up or down the Klondike Ned could not tell.

He balanced himself in the water and listened.

Above the howling of the wind he could hear the grinding of the propeller; it seemed to be coming his way; it was coming his way; in a moment more he saw a dark mass looming up before him.

"It's the Mic-Mac," he thought. "It must be the Mic-Mac! It's Edith and the Unknown come at last."

He shouted for all he was worth, but his voice was carried away by the wind, and no reply came back.

Meanwhile the steamer was coming steadily on, and Ned grew wild to make his presence known. He was not only getting tired, and felt decidedly alarmed over the situation, but was thinking of Dick, too, and his fear was that the steamer would pass the camp in the darkness and storm.

"By gracious, I'll get aboard of her or bust!" he said to himself, setting his teeth.

He pulled out, and treading water waited for the steamer to pass.

He could see her bow light distinctly now, and was just able to make out the man in the wheel-house.

Again he shouted, and still again, but it was no use, for the wind swept his words away.

"Never mind! I can make a go of it," muttered Ned, as the steamer went sweeping past.

There was a rope dangling down over her side and Young Klondike caught it, held on and went up the side like a monkey.

All wet and dripping he stood on the deck, and shook himself like some great dog.

There was nobody visible but the pilot, Charley Katzenberger, a good-natured Dutchman, in Ned's employ.

"Good enough! I'm all right now!" chuckled Ned. "I'll just give Charley a surprise."

He went on tip-toe over to the pilot-house, and peered through the dripping glass.

Charley Katzenberger was working away at the

wheel, peering ahead and trying to make out his way up the river. Ned softly opened the door and stepped in.

"Hello, Charley! You'll miss the camp if you don't look out!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"Mein Gott! What's dis, a ghost?" gasped the Dutchman, letting go the wheel in his excitement. "Burn my boots, if it ain't de boss!"

"That's me, Charley," said Ned, seizing the wheel. "Here, you'll be against the bank on the other side before you know it. The camp ain't that way."

Ned gave the wheel the proper turn, bringing the Mic-Mac into the channel again, explaining as he did so how he came on board.

"Burn my boots, if I heard you holler!" said Charley; "but then the wind blows so that it ain't to be expected. How far are we from camp?"

"Not far. Isn't that the Unknown coming? I hear heavy footsteps on the stairs."

"That's who it is. He's up and down every minutes. He's schust so afraid as never vas that I'll pass the place."

"Keep back out of the way. I'll give him a surprise," said Ned.

"I'll drop down out of sight," said Charley, and he did so.

Quick footsteps were heard approaching over the deck.

"Where in thunder are you going now, you blamed Dutchman?" a voice called out. "Do you want to run us ashore? I've told you twenty times that the camp is on the left bank, and—by the Jumping Jeremiah! am I mad or drunk? Young Klondike himself!"

"Hello, Zed," said Ned, coolly. "How do you find yourself to-night?"

It was a little man wearing a tall hat and big boots who stood in the doorway.

Like Charley Katzenberger, he stared at Ned as though he had seen a ghost.

"Tain't true!" he cried. "You can't be Young Klondike. Ye gods and little fishes, I must be mad."

Ned laughed heartily.

"Won't you come in out of the rain and talk it over?" he said. "Here I am as large as life. Thought maybe you'd have some trouble finding the place, so I came down the river to meet you—that's all."

"Well, it beats the Dutch!" cried the little detective, stepping into the pilot-house and discovering Charley Katzenberger in the corner. "How in Sam Hill did you get aboard?"

"Came up by the rope."

"But how in time did you get into the water?"

"Was washed in by the storm."

"Come, that'll do. I ain't got no more questions to ask. By the Jumping Jeremiah, you're a wonder, Young Klondike, that's what you are! Edith! Edith! Here's Ned! Come up and see the ghost!"

The detective's shout brought a very pretty girl into the pilot-house.

It was Edith Welton, the female partner in the firm

of Golden & Luckey, and when Ned told his story he told it to three.

"It's a most fortunate thing we happened along as we did," said Edith, when Ned finished speaking. "Now, don't try to laugh it off. You know very well you wouldn't have stayed in the river as long as you did, Ned, if there had been any possible way of getting out of it. Ain't that so?"

"Perhaps it is," replied Ned. "I ain't prepared to say it ain't, but all's well that ends well, so we'll drop the subject. Have you got it? That's what I want to know."

"Yes, siree, we've got it!" exclaimed the Unknown. "The Golden Eagle it safely stowed away amidships. And it's as fine a looking bird as ever you laid your eyes on. How's the hidden mine?"

"All there! You can see the gold lying scattered about in every direction just as I told you. Oh, it's a great mine if we can only get there and don't you make any mistake about it. The stories we heard ain't exaggerated one bit, but there's a big blight cast over the whole business now."

"What do you mean?"

"There's been an accident. We won't be the first to go down to the hidden mine."

"Merciful Heaven! You don't mean to say that Dick has fallen into the valley?" the Unknown exclaimed.

"No, no! Dick is all right."

"Then it's Jerry Quilter."

"No, it ain't Jerry Quilter. Wait a bit till I tell you," and Ned went on to tell about Professor Apple-dore and what had occurred on the ridge.

Of course Edith and the Unknown were both immensely interested.

"That's a bad business for certain," said the detective. "The place is hoodooed now."

"Don't you fret about that. It will take more than one dead man to scare me away from the hidden mine; still, I am very sorry the thing occurred."

"Look out where you are going, boss! Ain't we pretty near there now?" asked Charley Katzenberger. "Of course, it ain't going to do for us to pass the camp now."

"And we ain't going to pass it," declared Ned. "See that light on ahead there?"

"Hello! Yes, I do, now that you speak of it."

"That's our camp, of course," said the Unknown.

"Certainly it is. What else could it be? I only wish you could see this place in the daylight. You have no idea how wild and utterly deserted it is."

"Give Dick the call, Ned," said Edith.

"Let the Unknown do that," was the reply. "Let him do the foghorn act, for he's better able than I am."

This was true enough.

The detective had another of those deep, sonorous voices.

"Young Klondike's camp, hello!" he bellowed.

"Young Klondike's camp, hello!"

Immediately the light moved—shown brighter—kept on moving until it came close to the river bank.

“Dick’s all right!” cried Ned. “He’s run down to meet us!”

And Ned blew the whistle; it sounded hoarsely through the darkness and storm.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE GOLDEN EAGLE SPREAD ITS WINGS AND SOARED AWAY.

“HELLO, on board the Mic-Mac! Hello!”

Dick Luckey was shouting from the bank.

Dick could just about make out the steamer’s lights and that was all, for it was still very dark and no sign of any let up in the big storm.

“Hello, yourself, and see how you like it!” yelled the Unknown.

“That you, Zed?” called Dick.

“Yes, it is! How’s everything?”

“Don’t ask me. Get ashore as quick as ever you can.”

“Coming! Coming! Is it safe to run up alongside the bank?”

“Don’t know. The bank has been all washed out. Is Edith with you?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Is she all right? Are you all right?”

“Why, yes, certainly. Of course we are,” the Unknown called back.

He did not fail to notice the despairing tone in which Dick spoke, and he was quite prepared for the next question.

“Have you seen Ned?” called Dick, his voice trembling as he spoke.

“I’m looking at him right now!” answered the Unknown, and then Ned shouted, and Dick broke out with a wild cry of joy, but Ned did not know how frightened poor Dick had actually been until they came ashore and it was all talked over in the hut.

By the time they got through talking it was daylight, and with the rising of the sun the storm cleared away.

And what a night it had been.

“By gracious, it seems to me hours since we sat down to supper,” remarked Ned. “So much has occurred since.”

“All’s well that ends well,” replied the Unknown. “As for the professor, you did not invite him here, nor did you request him to go prying into your secrets, consequently I don’t see why you should blame yourself. Of course it’s a terrible thing, but we can’t spend time crying over spilled milk. We are for cold business, and the sooner we get down to it the better, I say.”

“And so do I,” added Edith. “Of course, we didn’t see the unfortunate man, and can’t be expected to feel as strongly about the affair as you and Dick do, Ned.”

“Right; I’m ready for business. Let’s see the Golden Eagle!” cried Ned.

Now, any one might be excused for wondering what all this talk about Golden Eagles meant.

It was neither a bird nor a piece of money to which these allusions had reference.

Probably the reader has not forgotten the talk Young Klondike made to Professor Appledore about a balloon.

If such is the case it would be well to remember it again, for now all hands went on board the Mic-Mac where the engineer, the fireman and Charley Katzenberger sat smoking their pipes on deck.

“Come to have a look at the big bird, boss?” asked Charley. “By schiminy, she vas a daisy—that’s right.”

“That’s what we are after, Charley,” said Ned. “Come on down and have a look, too.”

It was the Unknown who led the way below and opened the big case which took up more than its share of the deck room.

Inside was a great mass of oiled silk all crumpled up in the most surprising style.

Then, there in the end of the case in a separate compartment, which seemed to have been expressly built for it, was a basket-shaped car, and there were other things in other compartments all belonging to a balloon, for the Golden Eagle was a balloon and nothing else.

Young Klondike had placed the order in San Francisco months before, and now here at last his dream was realized.

The hidden valley lay just beyond, and here was the Golden Eagle by means of which they hoped to penetrate its mysteries.

“She arrived two days after you left, boys,” said the Unknown, “and Edith and I had a look at her when the custom house people opened the box which, of course, they would do, and we couldn’t stop it now, although we tried hard, too.”

“Hope they were satisfied,” replied Ned. “Did you tell them what it was for?”

“No, I didn’t, and they pressed me mighty hard to find out, too.”

“Is the thing being talked of much in Dawson City?”

“Talked of! Why, everyone is talking about it. What’s Young Klondike going to do with the balloon is the question in everybody’s mouth, but they got mighty little satisfaction from me I can assure you.”

“Glad of it,” replied Dick. “It seems that one man was on to our scheme as it was and I’ve no doubt others are too. I tell you frankly, Ned, I don’t expect to be left in peace here, not for a cent.”

“We won’t borrow trouble,” said Edith. “What we want is to get this thing out and blow it up, but I suppose we can’t do that till we’ve had breakfast, and then before anything else is done I want to have a look at this hidden mine of yours, Ned. I want to see

for myself whether the golden nuggets are lying all over the ground there, as you say."

"Well, you'll find they are there," Ned replied. "What's the matter with going up to have a look now?"

"Nothing at all. Our Charley Katzenberger is cook as well as pilot. You'll see what a fine breakfast he'll have ready for us by the time we come back!"

"You bet I will," said Charley. "Talk about your scarcity of provisions! There's none here on board the Mic-Mac. You'll see what a fine spread I'll have ready for you by the time you all come back."

So Ned led the way up on the ridge and showed Edith and the Unknown the tree where the rope was still tied.

Edith shuddered at the thought of Professor Apple-dore's fate, and the Unknown asked lots of questions about the affair.

While they talked Edith took a look through the glass, and declared that she could see the nuggets distinctly.

As for the detective, he fairly went wild at the sight of them.

"And is it really true that there's no way into this valley?" he asked.

"That's what they say," replied Ned.

"Well, saying so don't make it so, and for my part, I don't believe it."

"If there had been any way, someone would have been pretty sure to find it before this. Death Valley has been known for a long time."

"That's what's the matter!" said Dick. "I don't see any reason to doubt that the stories are true."

"Hold on! What's that moving about down there?" cried the detective, suddenly.

He seized the glass which Edith now held and leveled it on the bottom of the valley again.

"What is it? I don't see anything," said Ned.

"Well, I do then, or rather I did, for I must say I can't see it now."

"What did it look like?"

"Some big thing moving about."

"Alive?"

"Why, of course it was alive, or it wouldn't have been moving, would it?"

"Was it a man or was it an animal?"

"Looked more like an animal. By the Jumping Jeremiah, there it is now, right there by that big rock."

"I see something!" cried Edith.

"It's a bear," said the detective. "That's what it is, a big bear."

They all stood watching the animal which was shuffling along through the valley.

In a moment he passed under the shadow of one of the projecting ledges and disappeared.

This discovery set all hands thinking.

Ned was of the opinion that if a bear could get down into the valley, there must be some way which

had not yet been discovered, and Dick thought so, too.

The Unknown, on the contrary, was of a different mind.

"I'm not so sure it was a bear," he said. "It may have been an Indian with a bear skin pulled over him. You know these Alaskan Indians dress so at times."

"Those of the Bear Totem, or family, do," said Dick, "but as I understand it they are mostly confined to the coast."

"If one set to do it, you may depend that another does it, too," said the Unknown. "A bear don't walk about on his hind legs the way that fellow did. With all due respect to your honor, Young Klondike, I don't believe that was a bear at all."

"But when you come to talk about a man being there in the valley that means a lot," replied Ned.

"I suppose it does. Can't help it, facts are facts."

"It ain't proved to be a fact yet by any means," said Edith. "But if there is any chance to prove it, we want to do it right off now. What do you say to starting the Golden Eagle at once?"

"Right you are," said the Unknown. "Now's a good time to explore the secrets of Death Valley. Let's go."

They returned to the shore, and the remainder of that day was spent unpacking the balloon and getting ready for business.

A level space on the bluff had been selected where the balloon would be sheltered from the strong northwest wind in case another storm struck them, as it was liable to do at any time.

Then the big metal drums containing the hydrogen gas were brought ashore, and the process of filling the balloon began.

There were five of the drums, and it was supposed that two contained gas enough to fill the Golden Eagle once.

This gas had been made in Dawson City by a chemist; it was this man who first put it into Young Klondike's head to try the balloon. He claimed to be able to supply any amount of gas that was wanted, and no doubt his claim was true enough, but to Ned's disgust, after the second drum had been attached to the big gas bag for more than half an hour, there was no change in its appearance.

"What in thunder is the matter, Young Klondike?" demanded the Unknown, happening to come along about that time. "As a balloon blower you don't seem to amount to shucks. Look at your old gas bag! It ain't a bit bigger than it was an hour ago."

"There's something wrong, surely," replied Ned, looking puzzled. "I'm afraid that last drum had a leak in it."

"Meaning that it was empty when you hitched the tube into the balloon?"

"That's it!"

"Wouldn't wonder. Hydrogen gas is mighty subtle stuff."

"Is that what it is—hydrogen?" asked Edith.

"Exactly!" said the Unknown, "and if there is a hole as big as the point of a needle in the drum it is bound to find its way through it; then good-by to any work it ought to do on the balloon."

"That's what's the matter," said Ned, "and that I am afraid is what we've got to contend with. However, we'll try another drum."

The stop cock was then shut off, the old drum detached and the new one put in its place.

Instantly the balloon began to inflate, but this only continued for a few moments.

Again the drum was exhausted. Evidently it was not more than a third full.

"We'll fill the old thing if we have to break the bank on drums," declared Ned, and a fourth one was attached.

This proved to be quite empty, but the fifth one filled the balloon almost full.

It was not at all what Young Klondike had hoped for.

He saw that it would be impossible to make more than one trip down into Death Valley and out again, and they would be lucky if they could do that.

"We must have more gas at once," he declared.

"Send the Mic-Mac back to Dawson after a fresh supply," said Dick.

"That's what I shall have to do; if the gas ain't packed any better than this was, it won't do much good though. Here we are with everything ready for business only to be held back by this infernal blunder on somebody's part."

"Oh, we are good for two trips anyhow," said Edith. "Your patent valve and storage tank will fix that."

"If it does it will be a wonder. I don't trust it," declared Ned.

Now it was not Young Klondike's patent, although Edith called it so, but the work of the man who built the balloon.

Still it was very ingenious.

By means of a pump in the car the gas in the balloon could be forced down through a tube into an aluminum tank under the car and forced back again at will.

The aluminum tank scarcely increased the weight of the car when empty, but the weight of the gas when full helped to take it down, and when it was desired to rise again all one had to do was to pump the gas back into the balloon.

It was a splendid plan if it would work, but Young Klondike felt little confidence in it.

To try the experiment now might be to deprive themselves of the chance of getting out of the valley later on.

Ned talked it over with his friends, and it was determined to send Jerry Quilter back to Dawson on the Mic-Mac to bring up a dozen more drums.

"We won't make a move till he comes back," declared Ned. "We want to be on the safe side, and in a case like this it is better to be sure than sorry every time."

So the steamer started, and the remainder of the day was spent in prospecting along the ridge, trying to find if there could be a way into Death Valley, after all.

Nothing was discovered, and the boys went to bed disappointed.

"I say let's go ahead down into the valley and take our chances first thing in the morning," said Edith. "Why not? There is no doubt that the balloon is good for one trip."

"I don't object," answered Dick; "suppose we do it, Ned?"

"I've been thinking of it myself," said Ned. "She seems to be just as full now as she was this morning. I begin to think it would be safe."

"I'm with you if you decide to do it," said the detective. "You won't find any kick in me whatever you decide on, no matter what danger there is in it."

"We'll wait till morning and then decide," declared Ned. "I don't want to make any mistake."

It was not considered necessary to keep watch, and all hands slept through the night.

As early as five o'clock Ned was up and went out to have a look at the Golden Eagle.

The big balloon was riding at anchor on the bluff and looked as large and firm as it had the night before.

"I believe I'll risk it," thought Ned, "and if we are going to do it, we may as well do it now as any other time. I'll get Dick and Edith up, and we'll have breakfast, and then start right along."

He had scarcely come to this resolve, when chancing to look up the Klondike, Ned saw two boats coming down stream.

"I wonder who that can be?" he thought. "By gracious! I don't want any visitors here."

Ned ran into the hut, got his glass, and turned it on the boats.

There were six men in each, all rough-looking fellows, and in the second boat were two Indians.

Young Klondike did not like the look of his visitors at all.

"This won't do," he thought. "I wouldn't have those fellows see the Golden Eagle for anything, and yet how am I going to help it? Blest if I know!"

Ned was considerably excited, and no wonder, for while he had many friends among the miners on the Klondike, he also had many enemies.

These were not miners in the true sense of the term, but toughs, dead beats, hard characters generally.

Not a few of them had once figured as mining claim brokers on the old Exchange at Dawson City.

Young Klondike broke up the swindling old concern and formed a new Exchange, ruining a dozen or two of the toughest scoundrels in Dawson City. That some of these might be disposed to square accounts now, was not only possible, but highly probable.

All this flashed over Ned as he hurried into the hut and woke up the Unknown, Dick and Edith, and the news he had to tell brought them out on the bluff in a hurry you may be very sure.

"Pity we can't give them the shake and go off in the Golden Eagle right now," said Dick, as he took the glass and surveyed the boats.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, let's do it!" cried the Unknown. "I'm ready to take chances and start any time."

"Same here," said Ned. "I was just thinking that it might be a good idea."

"See any one there you know, Dick?" asked Edith.

"I see a fellow who looks like Ben Bagley," replied Dick. "Yes; it is Ben. I see him plain enough now."

"Hello! Then you see the meanest whelp that ever traveled the Klondike," said the Unknown. "He's a regular coward. I'm just spoiling for a fight with Ben."

But Young Klondike was not spoiling for a fight with any one, and he determined to start the Golden Eagle going at once.

"Load in what grub we need, and let's be off!" he cried. "Hustle, Zed. Come with me, Dick, and help get things ready. Edith, you might as well get right into the car."

But Edith preferred helping Dick, and while Ned examined the fastenings of the balloon, tried the valves, and saw that everything was in working order, Dick and Edith brought down a supply of bread, crackers and canned goods enough to last for two days.

These were put into the car, and Dick and Edith took their places.

"Get in!" Ned called to the detective. "You get right in, and I'll cast off."

"No, no! Let me do that," said the Unknown. "It's a big risk to get into a balloon after she's cast off."

"Just why I want to do it now," said Ned. "You're fat and clumsy and I'm young and spry. Hello! Those fellows are in sight of us! They see the balloon."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, yes, and they are signaling to us to stop. Wouldn't wonder if my man was among them. Perhaps we'd better hold up and fight it out. Ye gods and little fishes! I'd like no better fun than to clap the bracelets on to my man."

"Come, shut up! None of that," exclaimed Ned. "This is serious business."

"So's the other. It would be decidedly a serious matter for me if I could nip my man."

"Pitch him into the car, Ned. This is no time for fooling!" Dick called out.

Here was another peculiarity of the little detective whose name nobody knew.

He professed to be in search of a mysterious criminal whom he always called "his man."

What this man had done, or why the detective wanted him, nobody knew, but the Unknown was always discovering him, and often went so far as to seize on some unfortunate stranger and hustle him about, threatening to clap the handcuffs on him. Just as often he found himself mistaken, for although

this scene had been enacted twenty times at least since Ned Golden became acquainted with the Unknown, the detective was never fortunate enough to tackle the right man.

"Get in! Get in!" cried Ned. "Let's have no nonsense now; the boats are right upon us, and for my part I don't want any fight."

"Get in yourself. I don't understand working a balloon and you do," retorted the Unknown, "but I can cast off their anchors and climb in first rate."

There was no sense in wasting any more time quarreling about it, and Ned sprang into the car, and with his hand on the valve rope stood ready.

Time had been consumed in all this; the foremost boat was now just entering Moose Creek.

"Hello, there, Young Klondike!" Ben Bagley sung out. "Hold on with that air-ship of yours. I want to speak to you!"

"Call round next year!" Ned shouted back. "I want nothing to do with such fellows as you."

"By Heaven, you'd better stop or there'll be trouble!" roared Bagley. And he called out to his companions:

"Pull, boys! Pull! Shake 'em up lively there!"

The men worked the oars for all they were worth, and Bagley's motive was apparent. They were as yet hardly in range.

"Cast off those anchors! If you are going to do it do it quick and get in!" Ned shouted to the Unknown, but he made no reply to Bagley. He expected in a minute to go soaring into the clouds with the Golden Eagle. Then he wouldn't care a rap what happened to Bagley and his boats, he thought.

But the thing did not work out just as Young Klondike expected, for as it happened, the Unknown was altogether too spry in casting off the anchors.

Sooner than he looked for it the Golden Eagle spread its wings, so to speak, and sailed away Heavenward, but the unfortunate Unknown when he tried to get into the car made a miss of it and fell back.

An exclamation of horror broke from Ned, Dick and Edith.

They thought it was all up with the Unknown then. But no! When they peered over the side of the car there was the Unknown with his tall hat on the back of his head dangling at the end of the rope, hanging on for dear life.

"Not dead yet, Young Klondike!" he shouted. "Look out for yourselves. I can climb in."

The advice was sound. As a matter of fact Young Klondike had all he could do to look out for the balloon, for the wind caught it sooner than he anticipated and sent it toward the cliff.

Once more the detective made the attempt to climb over the edge of the car, and once more he missed it and fell back on the rope.

"Pull me in! Pull me in!" bawled the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, it's all up with me if you don't!"

At the same instant the balloon struck the cliff and

bounded back, and the crack of three rifles was heard in the direction of the boat.

CHAPTER V.

WORKING THE HIDDEN MINE.

It was life and death with the Unknown, and perhaps with all the passengers in the Golden Eagle.

The shots whizzed about the balloon, and Ned fully expected to hear the hissing of hydrogen gas from the big bag above his head.

Nothing of the sort happened. Probably the shots fell short, for it was scarcely probable that the men in the boat could have missed the balloon.

"Lay hold of the rope here! Pull for your life, Dick!" shouted Ned, and he seized the rope, leaning dangerously far over the edge of the car to accomplish it, and with Dick's help pulled for all he was worth.

"Steady! Steady!" said the Unknown, perfectly cool, now that he actually found himself coming up. "Just hold hard when you get me to the edge of the car until I can get a grip on it—that's all."

"You can trust me for that, all right," replied Ned, encouragingly. "See, we are going up like a rocket. They've stopped firing now."

This was true enough.

Ben Bagley and his crowd gave it up after the second round, for they saw it would be of no use.

Breathlessly the boys exerted all their strength, and held on until the Unknown made good his grip on the edge of the car.

"That's all I want. Now I cave in," he said, then he threw his leg over the edge of the basket, and with the assistance of Ned and Dick was safe.

"That's what's the matter! Next time I cast off a balloon I'll be a little more cautious," he said, coolly. "One has got to do these things three or four times to find out how they are done."

"See them watching us from the boats!" cried Edith. "Good gracious! but we've given them a surprise."

They were high in the air now, far higher than the top of the ridge where Professor Appledore met his terrible fate.

"By-by, Bagley!" yelled the Unknown. "Call around again some other day! Hooray! We are off for the hidden mine!"

"Well, don't tell all the world about it then," said Ned. "For my part I'm not over anxious that those fellows should know where we are going."

"Pshaw! They can't hear us," said the detective. "Don't you fret a bit about that. Now let them rip. We are off on the Golden Eagle. How do you propose to get down into Death Valley—is the steering apparatus going to work?"

"Don't know. Haven't tried it yet. My only idea was to get all our passengers aboard."

"Another hit at my misfortune. Well, well, keep it up if it does you any good, Young Klondike. If I am short, my shoulders are broad, and I can stand any amount of joking. Better make a try of it, though."

Now the steering apparatus attached to the balloon was another thing which Ned did not feel overmuch confidence in, but when he came to try it he found that it answered the purpose perfectly.

If the wind had been high it might have been different, but as it was, it proved to be an easy matter to bring the Golden Eagle over Death Valley.

Here they hovered for several minutes, and Ned found, to his great satisfaction, that there was no trouble whatever in holding the balloon in place.

"This is splendid!" cried Edith. "Really we couldn't ask for anything better. Now what's the matter with going down?"

"Just what I propose to do," said Ned. "I'll pump the gas down into the tank now. Watch and see her drop."

Certainly the man who made the Golden Eagle was an artist.

The gas pump worked to perfection.

Little by little the balloon began to shrink in size, and as it did so the boys found that they were rapidly sinking.

"That's enough!" cried the detective, at last. "Don't let out any more, Ned, or you may overdo it. Down we go!"

They were now down to the level of the ridge, and the descent continuing they dropped into Death Valley.

Ned watched the rocks on the side where Professor Appledore fell, as they passed downward.

As far as he could see there was no possible chance that the unfortunate man's life could have been saved.

Down, down they went, and in a few moments the Golden Eagle rested on the floor of Death Valley.

The wonderful voyage was over. They had penetrated a place where the foot of man had perhaps never trod.

The Unknown threw out the anchor and Dick sprang out of the balloon and made it fast.

"Edith, may I have the pleasure of assisting you to alight?" asked the Unknown, whipping off his plug hat and making a low bow.

Edith accepted his hand and sprang lightly out of the balloon, Ned following.

When the balloon had been properly secured they started to look around.

"Thunder! This is strange!" cried Dick. "When we looked down from above we could see gold everywhere, but now I'll be blest if I can see a sign of it anywhere."

This was true enough. To Ned's great disgust there was not a trace of gold visible.

The floor of the valley was carpeted deep with the same horrible moss which grows so plentifully all

over the Klondike country, often four and five feet deep, but here it was not over three.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, it looks very much as if we were sold," said the Unknown. "The moss seems to be everywhere. I don't understand it at all."

"I've been thinking ever since I started to look around here," said Edith, "that perhaps it was some way the light struck on the moss that gave it a yellowish look and made it assume fanciful shapes."

"Can't be so," said Ned emphatically. "What I saw I saw, and Dick knows it's so, besides you all saw it. Edith, I don't see how you can say such a thing."

"I'm sure I don't want to say it any more than you want to have me," replied Edith. "Gold is what we are after, and if it's here we are going to get it; suppose we look along a little further. After all, this ain't the place where we looked down."

"Hush! Look!" breathed Dick, suddenly. "What's that? Our bear!"

Considerably further down the valley, sitting on a rock, they could see a dark-brown object, which in the distance certainly looked enough like a bear to be one.

Ned got out his glass, but before he could get a good look the bear, if it was a bear, was gone.

"Let's get down there," he said. "We want to kill that fellow. For my part, I expect to spend the night here, and it won't do to have him prowling around our camp."

They pushed on through the moss which continued to grow deeper as they advanced, until at last it was almost up to their heads.

This moss grows with wonderful rapidity in the short Arctic summer. Nothing like it is known elsewhere. It is one of the wonders of this wonderful country, and is very often a great deal of trouble to those who attempt to work mining claims.

They had covered about half the distance to the place where the bear had been seen, when the Unknown suddenly stopped, pulled off his plug hat, tossed it up high in the air and caught it on his head as it came down.

"I have it, Young Klondike!" he exclaimed. "I've solved the riddle. Ye gods and little fishes, I've jumped right in it with both feet. Take my word for it, you'll find no gold here."

"Come! That's certainly encouraging," said Ned; "on what do you base your opinion, may I ask?"

"This ain't Death Valley at all."

"What!"

"Oh, I've said it, and you can just bet I'm right."

"But what in the world do you mean?" asked Dick. "I don't get on to what you are driving at any more than Ned."

"No, I suppose not, and yet it's plain enough. Remember how excited we all were when the Golden Eagle went up?"

"As though I am likely to forget it."

"Just so; you bet I ain't. Well, now, my claim is that the ridge on the other side of Death Valley don't

lie right against the mountain, as it appears to do, but that really there is another valley between it and the final rise."

"I'm blest if I don't believe you are right," cried Ned. "Then your idea is that we've crossed the second ridge, and have gone down into a valley which we have never seen?"

"That's it."

"I'm more and more convinced that you are right, for certainly this ain't the place we saw from our ridge."

"Maybe that's so, but I see the bear!" exclaimed Edith, breaking in suddenly. "All stand still now. I'm going to shoot."

None of them saw it at first, but they knew Edith could not be mistaken, and they watched her breathlessly as she sighted a point of rocks at some little distance ahead.

"I can see nothing," said the Unknown at last, "and my sight is pretty good, too."

Instead of answering Edith fired, and then all saw a huge brown bear suddenly rise out of the moss. With a curious noise, half growl, half cry, it turned and ran head on against the rocks, seemingly, and instantly disappeared.

"What's that mean?" cried Ned. "Evidently you hit it, Edith, but where has it gone?"

"Come," said Edith, hurrying on. "There's a mystery here, and we want to know what it means."

They hurried to the place, soon striking a trail of blood upon the moss which they followed to the wall of the cliff.

There was no bear and no way in which it could have disappeared apparently. The mystery was deeper than ever. All stood staring at each other, but no one seemed to know what to say.

Edith broke the silence at last.

"If anybody can explain this, I wish they would," she said. "What's become of the bear? It ought to be here, but it ain't. Where has it gone?"

"It takes a detective to solve such mysteries as this," said the Unknown. "Good-day, ladies and gentlemen. See you later."

And the Unknown ducked down into the moss, the strange stuff closing over his somewhat bulky form.

In an instant he was up again, exclaiming:

"Just as I thought! There's a cave here. It's hidden by the moss—that's all."

"Who wants to go fooling around a cave with a wounded bear in it?" cried Dick, drawing back.

"Afraid?" chuckled the Unknown.

"No, no! Not at all! I only want to be on the safe side."

"We are safe enough. The bear ain't in the cave. Get to work here and help me clear away this moss. I'll soon show you what I mean."

Ned lent a hand immediately, and Dick was not at all backward.

They soon laid bare the opening in the rocks which the Unknown had discovered, and as they did so Ned observed that the light struck through it.

"Who's right now?" cried the Unknown. "Didn't I tell you this wasn't Death Valley? Now you see it for yourself."

"It certainly goes clean through the rocks," said Edith.

"And no sign of the bear there, but the trail is all right. Edith, it ain't often that you make a miss like that."

"Let's follow the trail and solve the mystery," said the Unknown, and they all crawled through the cave, coming out into a second valley just as the Unknown predicted.

Instantly they saw that the detective's conclusion had been quite correct and knew that they were in Death Valley at last.

Surely this was a hidden mine and a rich one.

Golden nuggets lay scattered about everywhere. There was no moss here to hide them, and Young Klondike saw at a glance that once more they had made a strike of immense value.

He was not surprised. For a long time he had been listening to wonderful tales of this hidden mine.

Indeed as far back as the date of the first settlements in the valley of the Yukon, Indians were accustomed to bring down nuggets from the Upper Klondike. Could it be possible that they obtained them here?

While they were looking over the ground Dick Luckey had another of his wonderful strokes of luck, for, chancing to kick over a stone he saw the end of a nugget, which appeared to be singularly rich projecting out of the ground.

"Here's a big one!" he cried.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, that's what it is, too," echoed the Unknown. "It's half buried in the ground."

"We want to dig this right up," declared Ned. "You can see by the shape of it that there's ever so much more below ground; if it's as full of gold as this all the way through, it must be worth fifteen or twenty thousand dollars sure."

It was certainly something worth working for, and they determined to dig it up at once.

Ned went back through the cave to fetch the tools and was soon back again. By the aid of picks he and Dick were soon able to dig up the nuggets, which proved to be the largest and richest they had ever seen. It fairly bristled with gold.

"It wouldn't take more than a cartload of these things to make a fellow independent," declared the Unknown, "and unless I'm very greatly mistaken there's more just like it going to be found here."

After this they spent an hour wandering up and down the valley.

While it would not be true to say that there was gold everywhere, there was a lot of it. Nuggets lay scattered about in every direction, mostly small, to be sure, but worth millions in the aggregate.

Young Klondike and his friends were simply amazed by what they saw.

At last they sat down near the entrance to the cave

to talk the situation over, and make up their minds what to do.

"This is a big thing, Young Klondike," said the Unknown. "I don't think you can deny that it's the biggest thing we have struck yet."

"We or any one else," replied Ned. "Of course, all this is on the surface; if there's so much in sight, there must be an immense quantity below."

"Enough to pay off the English national debt," declared Dick. "Talk about being millionaires! We shall be billionaires if we are able to work this hidden mine for a year."

Strange as it may seem that such a stroke of luck should come to our two New York boys, what Dick said was only the truth.

The hidden mine was unquestionably the richest on the Klondike; the only question was how to get the gold up to the level where it could be run down the mountain and shipped.

Edith seemed to be greatly interested to know how it all came there.

"Why should it be on the surface here while in every other place we have to dig down fifteen or twenty feet for it?" she asked.

"Why, it's plain enough," replied Ned. "Don't you see that the rush of water through the valley in the spring time must be simply tremendous. Everything that is washable has been washed away long ago. Probably fully twenty feet of top soil have been washed out and very likely a great deal more. This leaves the gold deposit all exposed and easy to get at. You understand it now?"

"I suppose so," replied Edith. "But why isn't the ground frozen here as it is elsewhere?"

"Why, that's pretty plain, too. It's warm in this valley, and after the big rains everything has been washed out and is loose. You see the water has no direct chance to escape, and is absorbed by the ground. This melts the frost and saves us the bother of building the usual fire to thaw it out. I tell you it's a dandy mine to work. We couldn't have a better one if it was made to order—yes, that's right!"

Edith had reason to recall Ned's explanation later on, as will be seen.

Nothing having been seen of the bear, and there being no sign of Ben Bagley's gang on the cliffs above, where they had half expected to see them looking down, Ned proposed that they eat dinner and then go to work on the hidden mine, get out what gold it would be safe to carry up in the balloon, and return to the camp for their mining tools and other things necessary to begin the work in proper shape.

All hands agreed to this, and selecting a place where a little stream trickled down from the rocks, they began to dig.

Surface nuggets, big and little, were ignored, and Ned and Dick gave their whole attention to digging, while the Unknown and Edith washed as the stuff came up.

The result of a few hours' work was simply amazing.

The deeper they went the richer the pay dirt seemed to get.

We are almost afraid to tell how much that pile of dust and nuggets amounted to when they quit work.

It ran up into the thousands.

Young Klondike was so overcome by it all that he had nothing to say, but the Unknown kept rattling on at a great rate.

"Ye gods and little fishes! We'll be the richest people in the world," he declared for perhaps the fiftieth time. "This valley is simply an inexhaustible gold mine of huge proportions. I don't believe there's anything like it in the known world."

"Take it easy," said Ned. "We haven't got the stuff out yet."

"No, but there's no trouble in getting it out. All we need is a block and fall, long enough to do the business with, someone to load at one end and someone to unload at the other—that's easy arranged."

"Perhaps. We've got rope enough as far as that's concerned, if we could only set the fall far enough out to make it run clear of the rocks."

"Which we can do."

"Don't know about that," said Dick. "The rocks bulge so in the middle."

"Then we'll have to explore the valley till we find a place; either here or in the other valley we shall be sure to strike it. Meanwhile, let's go back to camp and see if those fellows have gone."

Leaving the gold where they had piled it up, they started to return to the balloon.

The Golden Eagle rode at anchor where they left it, Ned never dreamed of its having been disturbed as they plowed their way through the moss, but one glance at the interior of the car showed him that everything had been overhauled.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, who has been here since we've been gone?" cried the Unknown.

"Well!" exclaimed Edith, "there's one thing certain, we haven't got this valley to ourselves as we thought we had."

There were footsteps in the moss all around the car which they knew they had not made themselves.

Clearly there was a way into the valley that they knew nothing about.

Young Klondike was puzzled, perplexed and disgusted.

"This don't suit me for a cent!" he declared; "but what are we going to do about it?"

"We can't do anything now as far as I can see," replied Dick. "Don't seem to have been anything stolen."

"Could it have been the bear?" suggested Edith.

The boys laughed at the suggestion, but the Unknown gravely pointed to the footprints.

"Those may have been made by a bear," he declared. "I wouldn't guarantee they were human. Anyhow, there's no use in hanging around here. Let's start the Golden Eagle going and get back to camp."

"I'll cast off myself this time," declared Ned.

"No, you won't," said the Unknown, very emphatically. "You won't do anything of the sort."

"Oh, but I will."

"I know I made a botch of it before, but it don't follow that I'm going to do it again. I want to redeem my reputation as a balloonist, and ought to be given the chance."

"Take your chance, then," replied Ned. "But if you miss this time never even suggest trying it again."

So they all got into the car, and the Unknown cast off the lines and came in after them in great shape.

Then the Golden Eagle rose like a great bird and soared away.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST IN THE CLOUDS.

YOUNG KLONDIKE had been too much taken up with the wonders of the hidden mine to give the weather much thought when they embarked on the Golden Eagle late that afternoon.

Of course they all noticed that it had clouded over and was a great deal darker than it ought to have been at that hour, but sheltered as they were in the valley they did not realize how hard the wind was blowing, for down there they could not feel it at all.

But as soon as they got up to the level of the ridges it struck them, and the Golden Eagle was whirled about in a fashion which was decidedly alarming.

"Hello!" cried Dick. "There's no fun in this! How goes the steering, Ned? It don't seem to me that you are holding out against this wind at all."

"I don't believe I am," replied Ned. "I don't like this. We'll be jammed against the mountain on the other side of the Klondike next."

"Look down there!" cried Edith, suddenly. "Look, quick!"

They were just passing over Death Valley at the time, and as Ned glanced downward he could see a man standing near the pile of gold which they had left heaped up on the ground.

"Thunder!" cried Dick.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, my man!" shouted the Unknown.

Of course he had to have his little joke, but who the man was no one could have told, for they only caught a glimpse of him for a second, and then were whirled away over the ridge.

"We ain't got that valley to ourselves, that's one sure thing," cried Dick, but Ned said nothing. The time had come to let the gas out into the storage bag below if they wanted to drop down upon their old camp, but when Ned pulled the valve rope it would not work.

"Thunder! Someone has been tampering with the valve!" cried Ned, giving the rope a tug.

In so doing he let go the steering lever, and what little control he had over the balloon was instantly lost.

"Look out! Look out! We'll be over the river in a moment!" shouted the Unknown.

But the mischief was done already and it was too late to undo it. A strong gust of wind caught the Golden Eagle, and in a twinkling they found themselves hanging over the Klondike.

They could look down upon the hut and the camp, and even in the excitement of that perilous moment Ned took a good sharp look and saw that there was no one near it.

Ben Bagley and his crowd were gone and they were going too—going over against the high mountain which lay on the other side of the Klondike, whirled along at a fearful speed.

"Young Klondike, if we are dashed against these rocks it's all day with us," said the detective, very quietly. "Can nothing at all be done?"

"I'm sure I don't know what to do," said Ned. "I can't move the valve and even if I could we don't want to take a drop now."

"We must rise higher then," said Edith. "Shall we throw out ballast, Ned?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Out she goes!" shouted the Unknown. "I don't care to knock my head against that stone wall, not if the court knows herself, and I think she does."

Out tumbled the ballast bags, Dick lending a hand. Immediately the Golden Eagle soared higher.

Up, up they went until they were above the line of the mountain tops.

"Can't you turn her and steer back again, dear boy?" asked the Unknown.

"Impossible with this wind," answered Ned. "Perhaps one who understood handling the balloon better than I do might do it, but I can't."

"Are we over the mountain now?" asked Edith. "I can't see the rocks any more."

The fact was they could see nothing. They were running at fearful speed toward a dense mass of black clouds directly in front of them.

Ned realized what the inevitable result must be, and in an instant it was accomplished.

In the twinkling of an eye they passed out of the light into the clouds.

Now they found themselves surrounded by a damp, impenetrable mist, so thick that they could scarcely see each other's faces there in the car.

It was a bad state of affairs, and all realized it.

No matter how skillfully Ned might handle the balloon, it was no longer possible to tell which way they were going.

On all sides, except down the Klondike river, a rugged, desolate country lay about them.

To land anywhere would be to starve to death, if it so happened they did not strike a place where there was game enough to supply their wants, and this was very unlikely, for game is scarce in the Klondike country, as everybody knows.

For a few moments no one spoke.

Ned was fussing with the valve ropes, trying to find out what the trouble was.

"Seems to me that someone has tied the thing," said Dick. "It ought to work all right if it ain't so."

"Can you see?" asked Ned. "I can't get onto it at all."

"It seems to me that I can see a string passing from the valve to the meshes of the balloon," said Edith, peering up; "that's the way it looks to me, but I can't be sure."

"Let's take it cool," said the Unknown. "Ned, is there no way of stopping this mad flight except by letting the gas down into the storage bag?"

"I don't know of any way except to shoot a hole through the balloon. We'd go down all right enough then."

"That wouldn't do for a cent. Do you know I believe I could climb up there and unfasten the valve, for I believe Edith is right. Poor as the light is, I think I can see the string myself."

"Of course you couldn't. It's madness to think of it."

"Well, perhaps I'm spryer than you may think for, though."

"Don't you try anything of the sort. That's the merest nonsense as far as you are concerned, but I think I might do it though."

"You shan't, Ned," said Edith, emphatically.

"I may if I take the notion. Don't you be too sure."

"Suppose I tell you not to?"

"I don't always do as I'm told. You ought to know that by this time."

"If the valve is tied it must have been that man we saw near the gold who did it," said Dick. "I can't see who else it could have been, but for that matter if we are going to admit that we saw a man in the valley, he might have been anybody or had a dozen with him. I know you are all thinking of Professor Apple-dore, but it don't follow at all that it was him."

"Nor don't make much difference whether it was or not," added Edith, "for the fact remains that here we are, lost in the clouds, going further and further into nowhere every instant. It ain't a very pleasant situation, I must say."

"No, indeed it isn't," replied Ned, "and for my part I don't mean to stand it. Dick, you take hold here. Not that it does any good to attempt to steer the Golden Eagle, but a fellow likes to think he's doing something. I'm going up that rope to try to cut loose the valves."

"Someone ought to try it," declared the detective. "If nobody else is up to it I've no hesitation in trying it myself."

"Rubbish!" said Ned, "as though you could pull yourself up an inch rope with your big boots on."

"I might take off the boots."

"I'm taking off my shoes which will do a great deal better," laughed Ned. "Now don't anybody be alarmed. I'm going up to the valve and I'm coming

back again, too. I can do it as easy as rolling off a log. I for one don't propose to stay lost in the clouds if there is any way of helping it, and I think there is."

They watched Ned with breathless interest as he seized the rope, wound his legs around it and slowly worked his way upward.

"He's going to make it!" said the Unknown, breathlessly.

And he was right. Ned was almost up to the valve, but it was a fearful undertaking. If they had not been completely enveloped in the clouds, and Ned could have looked down from that dizzy height, it is doubtful if his head could have stood the strain.

But Young Klondike did no looking down. He pressed on boldly, and at last found himself under the big gas bag.

The wind was blowing steadily and the balloon swelled majestically above him, seeming to pulsate like some live thing, as it strained on the ropes making a noise like thunder, for the ropes snapped and creaked as they were lashed against the sides of the balloon.

Here was the string! Edith had not been mistaken. The valve was tied in such a manner that it would have been impossible to move it by means of the rope from below.

That someone had done the thing from pure maliciousness was evident enough to Young Klondike, and it settled the question of the presence of a stranger in Death Valley.

There was someone there, and that someone was an enemy who could have had no other design than to wreck the Golden Eagle in the clouds.

Balancing himself by his feet and one hand Ned got out his knife, cut the valve rope, fell and slipped down to the car again, greatly to everyone's relief.

"Is it all right?" asked the Unknown. He had not dared to call out and ask the question while Ned occupied his perilous position overhead.

"You bet it is!"

"The valve was tied?"

"Yes, sir."

"An enemy hath done this! Who could it have been?"

"We saw him standing there near the gold all right enough," said Dick.

"I begin to suspect it was Professor Appledore. In some marvelous manner the man must have escaped."

"You can think what you like!" said Ned, "but we are free now to descend whenever we choose. Shall we try it?"

"Most decidedly," replied the Unknown. "Every instant we are being carried further and further away from the Klondike, to be dropped between the river and the coast will be no joke and don't you forget it. I shouldn't mind going to Juneau in the Golden Eagle, but if we keep up our present rate of speed, we stand a fair chance of being dropped in the Pacific ocean in the end."

Of course the Unknown had to do just about so much talking, but Ned was already at work.

He opened the valve and the gas began to descend into the storage bag below the car. Dick worked the pump to send it down faster.

But whether they were descending or not they could not tell. Still enveloped in that cold, damp, impenetrable mist the situation at the end of ten minutes presented no different appearance.

They were still lost in the clouds.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTURED BY THE ROBBER BAND.

"I DON'T believe we are going down at all," remarked Edith at last. "It don't seem as if we were ever going to pass out of the clouds."

"We might be dropping at the rate of a thousand miles a minute and never know it," said the Unknown. "You see the eye has nothing to fix itself on. It is quite impossible to tell how fast we are going down, but it certainly seems as if we must be descending, but then we are moving forward, too."

"Oh, there's no doubt of that," replied Ned. "We are going forward about as fast as ever, but yet I can't help feeling very sure that we are going down."

"I know we are," said Dick. "I can feel the wind against my hand. I'm positively certain that we are going down. The fact is we were a great deal higher up than we thought for and it takes time."

Dick had scarcely finished speaking when the Golden Eagle passed out of the cloud bank.

It was like passing out of darkness into light.

They had ascended to a fearful height. The mountain tops lay far below them, the valleys between them seemed mere threads winding about in every direction.

Look which way they would they could see nothing of the Klondike. Apparently they had passed far away from the river, and no one can blame them for so believing, and yet it was not so, for actually the wind had blown them around in a vast semi-circle and they were not only at no great distance from the Klondike but within a few miles of the camp, but the position of the mountains was such that they could not see the river. They caught sight of it, however, as they went further down.

"There's the Klondike!" cried Edith, suddenly.

Ned tried to steer for it, but the wind current was entirely too strong for them.

In a moment they passed out of sight of it again, dropping down between two immense mountains.

The rocks seemed to close around them.

They were coming down into a deep hole or sink, between two enormous precipices.

A moment more and Dick caught sight of a small log hut standing near a stream.

Still another moment and the car struck the ground not a hundred feet away from the hut.

They had found a landing-place at last, but they had no more idea where they were than if the Golden Eagle had dropped them on the moon.

Ned scrambled out on one side and the Unknown on the other, and they made the balloon fast to two stunted trees which grew nearby.

"This is all right as far as it goes," cried the Unknown. "Hello there, in the hut! Hello!"

No answer came back.

The hut seemed entirely deserted, but when they went inside, which they did as soon as the balloon was secure, they found that it must have been recently occupied, and by a good many persons, too.

There were twelve bunks ranged along the walls in two tiers, six on a side. There was a long table and twelve chairs, a stove and quite a collection of dishes, pots and pans, besides many rifles and all sorts of personal belongings, clothes, boots, great quantities of them, boxes and boxes of tobacco, piles of provisions of all kinds, some of which were stored up in a shed behind the house.

It was really wonderful the amount of stuff there was packed into that little hut, and in a shallow cave between the rocks behind it there seemed to be still more stowed away.

Ned and Dick gave vent to various exclamations of surprise as they took in all this.

"There's stuff enough here to start a town!" Edith exclaimed.

But the detective only grunted as his eyes roamed from one pile of goods to another.

"What do you make of it all?" asked Ned.

"Robbers," replied the Unknown, in his abrupt way.

"Hello! Do you mean we struck headquarters for one of those gangs of infernal thieves, who are always going through the poor miners up this way?"

"Exactly so. I believe Ben Bagley is in that business, too."

"Mebbe this is Bagley's hold-out."

"Shouldn't wonder a bit."

"We shall probably find out if we stay here long enough," said Dick. "I say, let's straighten up the balloon and light out as soon as we can."

To this nobody objected, but straightening up the balloon proved to be a longer task than they supposed.

The valve arrangements had been badly damaged.

To his horror, Ned discovered that the gas was rapidly escaping from the storage tank.

If he had not made this unpleasant discovery it would not have been possible to raise the Golden Eagle again without refilling it, and that, of course, would be impossible to do until the Mic-Mac returned.

As it was, Ned managed to stop the leak, and although he could not positively determine, he felt sure that he had saved enough gas to send the Golden Eagle up again.

But to repair the balloon even in the most temporary manner took more than an hour.

It was now beginning to grow dark, and to leave by the Golden Eagle before daylight was something they hardly dared to attempt.

"We may as well stay here and make ourselves comfortable," said the detective. "We'll sleep close to the balloon and give the hut a wide berth. If the robbers come we ought to be ready for them. There are rifles enough, dear knows."

It was so arranged, and the Unknown brought down twenty rifles from the hut, saw that they were all loaded and ready for business, and ranged them around the place where Edith and Dick rolled up in their blankets. Then he lay down to snatch a little sleep.

"Ned and I will watch," he declared. "Don't you fret, Edith. The robbers won't get you while we are on guard."

Now it was all very well to be so confident, but they had to deal with a shrewder band of scoundrels than they were aware, and most certainly they were not aware that even then two pairs of keen eyes were looking down upon the Golden Eagle from a point far up on the side of the mountain behind the hut.

They were two rough-looking men armed with rifles. One had a glass, through which he was looking down into the sink.

"That's Young Klondike all right," he said, shutting up the glass at last. "Strange they should have landed here with their blamed old gas bag, but there they are for a fact, and I should rather say our time had come."

"You bet it has," replied the other. "If we can capture the balloon we can work the Death Valley diggings all right, and you know what that means."

Then both men picked up their rifles and passed on down the slope, disappearing among the bushes below the ledge on which this conversation had taken place.

The long evening wore itself out, and night came on.

Edith and Dick slept soundly, for they were pretty well tired out.

For a while Young Klondike and the Unknown sat talking over matters, but at last the detective grew restive and began pacing up and down with his rifle over his shoulder.

"Confound those robbers. I wish they'd come if they are coming, and let us have our fight out with them and done with it," he exclaimed.

"You speak as though we were sure to win that fight," replied Ned.

"And ain't we? I guess yes! When do we ever fail?"

"This might be our time to fail. Who knows?"

"I don't think so. I'm tired of sitting around here doing nothing."

"Tired sitting! Who's sitting? I thought you were walking."

"Now, don't be funny, dear boy. I feel restless."

"I see you do."

"I'm going to take a stroll down the sink by moonlight and see what I can run against. Do you stay here till I come back."

"If you must go you may be very sure I shall stay here till you come back, and I wish you'd stay, too."

But the Unknown would not hear to it, so off he went down beyond the robbers' hut. Ned watched him as he disappeared in the moonlight.

Then feeling restless himself, he walked over to the Golden Eagle and began to examine the fastenings of the balloon.

They seemed to be all secure.

Ned stood leaning with one arm on the car looking down the valley, expecting to see the Unknown reappear, when all at once there was a shot and a sharp cry.

"Ned! Help!" came the shout in the Unknown's voice.

Ned grasped his rifle and made a rush for the direction of the cry, but he never got two feet away from the Golden Eagle, for suddenly four men leaped out from behind the car.

One struck at him with a loaded sand-bag, and Young Klondike dropped like a log.

"Go for the girl and the other snoozer, Ben!" cried one. "I'll take care of Young Klondike, and the boys won't let the little detective escape."

Two hurried over to where Dick and Edith still slept, while Ben Bagley and his companion picked up the unconscious form and tossed it into the car.

Young Klondike had been captured by the robber band.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT WITH THE MAN-BEAR.

It was a terrible blow. The only wonder was it hadn't killed Young Klondike outright.

Fully fifteen minutes elapsed before Ned was himself again.

When his senses returned he was still lying on his back in the bottom of the car, and the Golden Eagle was sailing through the clouds.

Ben Bagley and another man, whose name Ned afterwards knew to be Simon Snedeker, sat facing him, watching him with curious eyes.

"Hello, boss," said Ben. "So you've come to life, have you? That's what we want, but b'gosh, I began to think it was something we weren't going to get."

Ned raised himself and took his place on the seat. He was half dazed, his head ached horribly. He realized that he was in the power of these two men, and did not know what to say for the moment.

"We've got you! Yes, we've got you," continued Bagley, before he could find speech, "and what's more we mean to hold on to you until we have a chance to

look over that hidden mine. You gave us the slip once, Young Klondike, but you won't do it again."

"I don't feel much like giving anybody the slip just now," groaned Ned. "I'm pretty well used up, as I should think you might see."

"Take a drink of whisky," said Bagley, extending his flask.

"I don't want your whisky."

"Don't be sulky, boss. You can't shake us. We've disarmed you, too, and you can't fight."

"That's plain. Ben Bagley, you're a big scoundrel."

"That so?"

"Yes."

"That's a chestnut. Tell us something new."

"What do you want with me? What's your purpose?"

"I've explained that. We want to go down into Death Valley. We want a look at your hidden mine."

"In other words you want me to steer the balloon?"

"Yes."

"I can do it."

"Of course, you can. Will you?"

"I'm thinking."

"Make up your mind quick. If you don't do it there's going to be trouble, that's all."

"There's trouble now. What have you done with my friends?"

"Don't you fret about your friends. Dick and Miss Edith will be well treated."

"And the Unknown? I remember well, Bagley, that you never liked him. What do you mean to do with him?"

"Huh! Your memory is A No. 1, Young Klondike. No; I never liked that detective. I always hated him. Don't you worry. We'll see that he's taken care of, all right; now, then, to business. Can you steer us down into Death Valley? Will you steer us down into Death Valley, or what do you propose to do?"

Now Ben Bagley was a mild spoken man, and he put the question mildly enough, but at the same time there was a deep meaning in the way he put it. Ned fully realized that to refuse meant serious trouble, perhaps death to himself and his friends.

Yet he remained perfectly cool and was disposed to bargain.

"Before I say yes I want to know how it is with my friends?" he said. "You've got me a prisoner. Have you got them too?"

"Of course we have," sneered Bagley. "Don't you doubt it, my boy."

"Will you promise that no harm shall come to them if I consent to this?"

Bagley gave an evil laugh.

"I'll tell you what it is, Young Klondike," he replied; "I'm nobody's fool. You ought to know it. I've arranged all that, and don't you make any mistake."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean simply this—if we don't return in forty-

eight hours there's going to be a shooting match down there at our place, and the shooting is all going to be on one side—our side! Dick, Edith and the Unknown will be tied to trees when the shooting begins. As to what will happen after that, I wouldn't undertake to say."

Then Bagley took out Ned's own revolver and another, and laid them across his lap.

"Five minutes, Young Klondike, and that ends it. You can take your choice," he said.

There was no help for it—positively none. Ned determined to yield.

"Very well; you've got me where I can't get away," he said. "I'll take you down into Death Valley if I can steer the balloon."

"What's to hinder?"

"It depends upon the wind."

"Don't the steering gear work."

"It works after a fashion. I can steer somewhat with the wind, but I can't steer against it at all."

"The wind is with us, ain't it?"

"Yes, to a certain extent, as near as I can make out."

"Death Valley lies off that way, don't it?" asked Bagley, looking down.

"We've passed over Death Valley long ago," was Ned's quiet reply.

"Nonsense."

"No nonsense about it—it is so."

"But we haven't come to the Klondike yet."

"If I know anything about the slope of these mountains we must have crossed the Klondike long ago. Probably you were so rattled when the balloon first went up that you didn't notice, or perhaps there was a cloud in the way."

The first was the fact. Ned's guess was a shrewd one, but he had studied the slopes of the mountain peaks too carefully when they were up in the clouds before to admit of a mistake now.

"The whole amount of the matter is, we are traveling in a circle," he said, after watching the course of the wind for a moment. "If I'm any judge our course will bring us back over Death Valley sooner or later. I can only keep the balloon in the circle. If you expect anything more you had better apply to someone else."

"He's right," growled Simon Snedeker; "I told you that before."

"Do it your own way," said Bagley, "but let me tell you one thing, boss, and you know I'm a man who always does as he says, I'll put a bullet through your brain if you steer us off our course."

Ned made no reply to this. He took the tiller of the steering gear and got the Golden Eagle into the wind.

Here he held it, and watching the mountain peaks saw the Golden Eagle slowly and majestically swing around the vast circle, following the air currents created by the same peaks.

He soon saw that they were coming to the Klondike again, for the moon struck down upon the river, and

it looked like a vast silver ribbon winding in and out among the hills.

"We are on the right track now, Ben," said Snedeker. "You can see that for yourself."

"I wonder if we are," was the answer. "Look out, Young Klondike. Don't you fool us now."

The words were scarcely spoken when a strange light suddenly broke away off among the stars.

"A meteor?" cried Ned. "Heavens! What if it strikes the balloon?"

It was a wonderful sight and one never to be forgotten.

With a long trail of fire behind it the meteor went whizzing by the Golden Eagle.

As it approached it looked as though it must surely strike the balloon, but in reality it was a long way off and they felt no heat as it passed.

Suddenly it burst with a sharp report and the scattered fragments flew in every direction and the light disappeared.

"By time, I don't like that!" exclaimed Bagley. "What if it had struck this blamed old gas bag. Where should we have been then?"

"It was miles away," replied Ned, quietly. He kept on with his steering and for some moments never said a word.

"Young Klondike, I admire you," said Bagley at last.

"And why?" Ned asked.

"You take things so infernally easy. Tain't no use talking, one can't rattle you for a cent."

"Thank you for nothing, I don't want your compliments. When I undertake to do a thing I do it, that's all."

"Exactly. You always did. You undertook to get into Death Valley and you got there where any one else on the face of the earth would have failed. Oh, we were watching you for a long time."

"You were?"

"Yes; we saw you when you were up here before prospecting."

"Yes?"

"Oh, yes, we did, and don't you forget it! I said then to my partners that sooner or later you'd succeed in getting into Death Valley, and it seems I was right."

"How about getting in there now?" said Snedeker. "If I know anything we are about there."

They were, and Ned had no other idea, than to run the Golden Eagle down to the hidden mine, for in no other way could he hope to return to Edith, Dick and the Unknown, and that he was determined to do at any sacrifice to himself.

He looked over the side of the car.

The Golden Eagle was hanging over the hut which he had gone to so much trouble to build.

"Now, then, work that pump and down we go!" he cried, steering the balloon over the ridge.

Ben Bagley had already surrounded the mechanism of the pump or he could not have sent the balloon up into the clouds as he did.

He now proceeded to pump the gas back again into the receiver below the car, and the balloon dropped with amazing rapidity.

Ned could not but admire the perfect way in which it worked, but the fact was he was becoming more and more skillful each time he handled it. In short, Young Klondike bid fair to become an expert aeronaut if he kept on.

In a moment they were at the bottom of the valley, landing at a point considerably above the tunnel.

Ned held the balloon steady as it went skimming over the ground, and Ben Bagley threw the anchor out.

It caught against a rock and held, and then Bagley and Snedecker got out and made it secure.

"Hooray! We are here!" cried the former, glancing around. "Thunder and guns! Look at the gold! We'll be richer than the Rothschilds. Bully for you, Young Klondike! We'll never forget you! Promise us to do the right thing and not interfere with us, and you shall come in for your share."

"Come, that's cool," said Ned, "you rob a man and then offer to divide with him. Well, I like that."

"Come away from the balloon. Don't you stand within a hundred feet of it!" Bagley broke out. "I read treachery in your eye."

Ned walked away in silence.

"Hold on! Don't get sulky," called Bagley, "you've gone far enough now. Stand where you are."

Ned paused. "Well, what do you want me to do next?" he asked.

"We want your advice."

"About what?"

"How much gold will the balloon carry up?"

"I wouldn't risk any."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do; I don't believe there's power enough left in the gas we have to move than carry us up again, if it will do that."

"Hello! Do you think there has been a wastage?"

"I don't think anything about it. I'm sure of it."

"That's a bad job. Then all we can do is to look at the gold."

"That's all we did."

"Blamed if it ain't so, Sime," Bagley said, turning to his partner. "This don't suit our plans, not for a little bit."

"Well, I should say not," growled Simon, "but what are you going to do?"

"Wait till we get more gas, I suppose? Young Klondike, that's what you sent the Mic-Mac down to Dawson for, ain't it?"

"That's the idea."

"When do you expect her back again?"

"Don't know."

"But you have some notion?"

"Oh, in a day or two perhaps. What's the use in

asking me all these questions? I can't answer what I don't know."

"Stay where you are then, and don't you move a step nearer the balloon unless you want to die!" growled Bagley, and he and Snedecker walked off up the valley, examining the wonderful display of nuggets as they went along.

Morning was just dawning. The sun had not penetrated the valley yet, but it was getting very light.

For a little while Ned stood where they left him, and then began to edge toward the balloon.

But it was no use to attempt to elude the watchful eye of Ben Bagley.

"Hold on there!" he cried, suddenly wheeling around and raising the revolver. "Not another step or you're a dead man!"

Scarcely were the words uttered than Ned saw a strange form spring out from the shelter of the rocks.

It was a tall man with a bearskin thrown loosely over his shoulders, the head of the beast resting on his own head and secured there in some way.

With a diabolical yell this strange being flung a big stone at Simon Snedecker's head, and sent him to the ground in a hurry.

"Gee whiz! What's this?" gasped Bagley.

He fired and missed.

In a twinkling the man-bear had him by the throat. Down they went, locked in deadly embrace, rolling over and over on the ground.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WRECK OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

"HELP, Young Klondike! Help!"

Probably Ben Bagley was just as well satisfied that he had not shot our hero the way things had turned out now.

Of course, Ned could not stand by and refuse his help to any human being in such desperate straits as this.

He ran with all speed toward the spot, but in spite of that he was too late.

Suddenly the man-bear sprang to his feet, lifting Ben Bagley up as though he was a baby, and holding him above his head ran like a deer.

The sun was in the valley now, and Ned catching a glimpse of his face saw that he had to deal with a giant Indian, and evidently a person of amazing strength.

He turned his head as he ran, snapping and snarling and showing his teeth like a dog.

By the strange light in his eyes Ned saw what the trouble was.

The Indian was mad—mad beyond all question. As he ran on Bagley's yells were piteous to listen to.

"Shoot him! Young Klondike," he screamed.

"Shoot him! Kill him! Save me! Your friends are goners if you don't."

There was no need for him to add those last words, for Ned was doing his best.

He seemed to forget that Young Klondike had no weapons and that his appeal for help was almost useless.

Quite useless as it turned out, for before Ned could cover half the distance between them, the man-bear had reached the cliffs.

Up the steep rocks he leaped, holding the wretched Bagley above his head with perfect ease.

The robber chief could not make a move before, and to have done so now would have meant death.

"It's all up with me!" he yelled dismally, and it was the last he had a chance to say, for at the same instant the Indian made a dive between two projecting crags and disappeared.

He was gone in an instant, and Ned could not see where he went further than that he rounded one of the crags and did not reappear.

It was all over, and utter silence reigned in the valley.

Ned tried to get up to the crag, but could not.

It had all been easy enough for the Indian, but try as he would Young Klondike could discover no way of getting up himself, and he almost broke his neck in making the attempt.

The situation was overwhelming.

Ned stood leaning against the cliffs hardly knowing what he was about, then he recollects Simon Snedecker and hurried back to where the robber still lay stretched out on the ground.

One glance was enough. The eyes were half opened and glazed; there was a great pool of blood under the head.

"His skull was crushed. He's as dead as a doornail," thought Ned, and so indeed it proved.

Ned could scarcely realize it. Both his enemies had been swept away in a moment.

Would it be his turn next?

It seemed a good time for getting out of Death Valley, but then Young Klondike hesitated to go and leave Ben Bagley to the mercy of that mad savage, for such the man-bear undoubtedly was.

He waited fully fifteen minutes, taking possession of Simon Snedecker's revolver meanwhile.

Nothing occurred.

Ned kept his eyes fixed on the crag, but there was no reappearance of the man-bear.

"If the Golden Eagle will take me out I'd better go," he thought.

His thoughts ran principally to Bagley's threat as he now hurried toward the balloon.

Was it true that the robbers had been ordered to shoot Dick, Edith and the Unknown if the balloon did not return by a given time?

Ned thought it more than likely, and he resolved to hurry back to that hidden mountain hut as fast as the Golden Eagle could carry him, if there was still power enough left to carry him at all.

Jumping into the car, he began pumping the gas up into the balloon.

It worked better than he thought, for the balloon immediately began to fill.

Ned saw that he had better cast off now or there would be trouble, so he hauled in the anchors, and the balloon rose about half way up to the ridge and hovered there while Young Klondike continued to work the pump.

As he was pumping away Ned discovered that he was hovering directly opposite the crag where the man-bear had disappeared.

He could easily see now that here was the mouth of another cave or perhaps a tunnel leading into the other valley like the one below.

While the balloon still hovered there a fearful yell rang out through the cave, and all at once Ned caught sight of a man running out of its depths toward the light.

"Ben Bagley!" he thought, and he would have helped the wretch, scoundrel though he was, if he could have done it.

But it was not Bagley.

In an instant Ned got a better view of his face and saw that it was Professor Appledore and no one else.

"Young Klondike! Young Klondike! Help me! Save me!" he shouted, holding out both hands appealingly.

Then all in an instant Ned saw the man-bear rush up behind him.

Seemingly he caught the professor by the back of the neck with his teeth, but he must have used his hands, too, for he flung the professor up over his head just as he had done Bagley and turning trotted back into the cave with him, the bear-skin trailing behind him as he went.

By this time there was more gas in the balloon, and a sudden rush of wind catching the Golden Eagle, away she went up out of the valley.

Now the wind had full sweep, and once it got hold of the balloon it rose with great rapidity.

Ned saw that the direction of the wind was favorable for a quick passage back to the sink, and dismissing all thought of the strange happenings in Death Valley, he devoted himself to business, steering the Golden Eagle over the Klondike and the mountain tops, keeping a sharp lookout for the hut all the while.

Suddenly he saw it, and found himself so nearly over the sink that he felt afraid that he would not be able to drop into it after all.

He worked the pump with all his might, and made out to start the Golden Eagle down just in time.

But he was too near the cliffs on the other side of the sink, and the force of the wind blew the Golden Eagle against them.

She struck with fearful force, and immediately rebounded and still continued to drop.

"It's all right now, if some of those fellows don't shoot a hole through me," muttered Ned, leaning over the side of the car and looking down.

He could see no one. There was the hut, but to all appearances it was quite deserted.

Ned's heart stood still. An awful fear seized him. Had he come too late?

"Hello! Hello out there!" shouted the Unknown's voice from inside the hut, as the car struck the ground and dragged noisily over it. "Come on. By the Jumping Jeremiah! I can fight you all single-handed. Only give me the chance!"

Ned shouted back, but the noise of the car dragging over the ground drowned his voice.

With great difficulty he managed to get the anchor out, and it caught on a rock and held.

It took Ned just about three minutes to complete his landing then, and he ran back to the hut with his revolver drawn and ready for serious business.

It was not to come. There were only prisoners in the hut—Dick, Edith and the Unknown.

Each was tied hand and foot, and lay in one of the bunks against the wall.

"Ned!" cried Dick, as Young Klondike came bursting into the room. "Good Heavens! Is it you! We thought it was Ben Bagley back again."

Dick's surprise was complete, but Ned never stopped to answer until he had cut Edith free and then sprang to his partner's side.

"Dick, old man, by gracious, you didn't think I would desert you?" he cried.

"Never!" exclaimed Edith. "I said you'd be back with the balloon and help us—didn't I, Dick?"

"And didn't I?" echoed the Unknown. "Ye gods and little fishes, if ever there was a man thoroughly ashamed of himself, Young Klondike, you see that man before you now! Yes, sir! They caught me from behind. Sandbagged me before I could say boo! I believe I did let out one roar for help, but I was knocked out on the second round the next. Don't trust me again; don't you ever do it, for I'll go back on you every time."

By this time they were all on their feet and out of the hut, and Ned was explaining what had happened to him.

"Where are they all?" he asked, as soon as he had finished his story.

But Dick had no report to make. All he knew was that soon after the robbers had tied them in the bunks they left the hut and had not been seen since.

"I don't know that I can blame myself for letting them capture me," he added. "They pounced on us before I was awake; four of them, and first I knew Edith and I were under their revolvers. Of course, we had to give right in—what else could we do? What worried me most was about you, though, and from what you tell me I see that I didn't worry without good cause."

"I'm off!" said Ned. "Don't let's talk any more now. We want to get right back to Death Valley and look after our interests. We can't afford to be driven off from the hidden mines by mad Indians or robbers or anybody else."

"Not much!" echoed the Unknown, "but will the Golden Eagle carry us over again?"

"Yes, and half a dozen times," replied Ned. "There ain't half the waste of gas that I supposed."

"Then let's start instantly. I quite agree with you. The hidden mine in Death Valley is worth altogether too much for us to let go of it in a hurry."

They hurried over to the Golden Eagle and all went aboard.

When Ned began pumping up the gas he found that the balloon did not fill as rapidly as it had done on all other occasions.

It looked as if the rubbing up against the rocks it had received might have seriously damaged it, but after a little it began to rise and they soared away.

"More trouble, Young Klondike!" said the Unknown, as soon as they had risen above the mountains.

"A storm," replied Ned, quietly.

"That's what."

"And it's coming right along," said Dick, looking at the great mass of clouds banking up in the west.

"If we get caught in that I suppose there is very little to hope for."

"Nothing at all," replied Ned. "It would whirl us off over the mountains and there is no telling where we would fetch up. We simply mustn't get caught in it—that's all."

After that there was no more talking, for the storm came on with great rapidity.

But Ned had made his calculations and they worked out all right, for just as he anticipated they were caught in the first rush of wind which preceded the storm and were sent flying forward with lightning speed, fortunately in the very direction they wanted to go.

"That's the talk! We'll be over Death Valley in ten minutes now!" the Unknown exclaimed.

Ned made no reply but held fast to the steering gear, keeping a sharp lookout ahead.

All in a moment they were whirled across the Klondike; another would take them over Death Valley.

Ned caught the valve rope and shouted to Dick to look to the pump and throw down the gas into the receiver below.

"Quick! Quick!" he called. "There's not a second to lose!"

Dick did his best, and the balloon began to sink.

Ned's calculation was wonderfully accurate, and all would have gone well if they could have been allowed ten seconds more.

But the storm caught them just as they were dropping below the line of the ridge.

All in an instant they found themselves in a whirl of wind and rain.

"Keep cool?" cried Ned. "We're all right!"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, are we? No trouble about keeping cool with the rain coming down on us by the tubful!" growled the Unknown, when all at once they were dashed against the cliffs on the farther side of the valley.

The shock was fearful. It threw them all against each other in the car.

Looking up Ned saw that the balloon had been ripped up from bottom to top.

"We are done for!" he gasped. "Hold hard!"

Down they whirled with fearful rapidity, but the end was not as serious as Young Klondike feared.

Once below the line of the ridge the force of the wind was broken. The car bumped against the ground tumbling them all over again, but nothing worse, for Ned flung out the anchor and it held fast, catching against a convenient rock.

"Safe at last!" cried Young Klondike, leaping out of the car.

And so they were safe in Death Valley, but how could they hope to get out again?

If tradition told the truth this was something man had never yet done; how could they escape with the Golden Eagle a hopeless wreck.

CHAPTER X.

THE RESCUE OF BEN BAGLEY.

THE first thing Young Klondike and his friends did was to take shelter from the storm under a projecting rock.

Here they remained for fully half an hour until the fury of the gale had passed.

It stopped raining then as suddenly as it began, and our friends who remained watching from their shelter began to think it was about time to make a move.

"We are in for it now," said Dick. "What in the world are we going to do?"

"Don't worry," replied Ned. "Take it easy; I have an idea all is going to come out right."

"Certainly it is," added Edith. "We've been in worse difficulties than this, and we always manage to escape."

"Now look here," said the Unknown, "I don't want to croak, but the situation is really very serious. Here we are landed in this terrible Death Valley with nothing but gold to depend on."

"Some would think that quite enough to depend on," laughed Ned. "I ain't borrowing trouble. That's one thing sure."

"Can we eat gold, Young Klondike?"

"Are you hungry?"

"Not now, but I am going to be."

"Wait till you are, then. We can stand it three days, anyhow, and perhaps longer. Remember the bear!?"

"The bear we didn't get? Was it your man-bear, Ned?"

"Hold on! I declare it wasn't," said Edith. "I think I know a real bear when I see one."

"By gracious! There's one now!" broke in Dick, pointing over toward the rocks on the other side of the valley.

"It is! Surely it is!" cried Edith, seizing a rifle, for they had taken care to provide themselves with half a dozen fine Winchesters out of the stock in the robbers' hut.

The bear was walking slowly along under the rocks apparently paying no attention to them.

"Wait before you fire, Edith," said Ned. "Let's make sure. If it is that mad Indian we want to know it."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, it's no Indian. That's a bear fair and square," declared the Unknown.

"Give me a minute—only a minute!" said Ned. "Just long enough to turn my glass on him. I really want to know."

Ned whipped out his glass and studied the monster.

Now the animal had seated himself on his haunches, and seemed to be looking their way.

"It's a bear, fast enough," said Ned, "but I wouldn't fire if I were you."

"Why not?" asked Dick. "We want fresh meat the worst kind of way."

"Ned's right," said the Unknown; "we don't want to rouse the whole valley with the rifle shot."

"That's what I say," added Ned, "and besides, I've got another idea."

"Which is what?" asked the detective.

"We know there are men in this valley. As for the Indian, he must have got in somehow. That means there's a way in and a way out."

"Exactly," said the Unknown. "Of course, there is."

"Then we must find the way, and I believe if we let the bear alone he may show it to us; at all events we can only try it on."

"I won't fire," said Edith, grounding her rifle. "Let's watch the bear."

They had not long to wait before the animal made a move.

After a little he got up and walked slowly along under the rocks for a few hundred yards, and then began to ascend.

"That's the place!" cried Ned. "The cave is right ahead, though. See, it's easy climbing there. I don't see how I came to miss the place."

Higher and higher the bear climbed, until Ned declared that he must be on a level with the cave.

Now he paused and faced them again for a moment, and then got up, shuffled in among the rocks, and disappeared.

"That's the cave," said Ned; "I'll bet you what you like it's a tunnel like the one we struck before, and passes clean through the mountain."

"In which case it ought to bring us out somewhere near our hut, hadn't it?" asked Dick.

"Not very far from it. We'd better investigate that right away."

"Fight or no fight!" cried the Unknown. "Young Klondike, your head is level. Come on!"

All took their rifles and they started across the valley, fully realizing the risk they were running.

They had a little difficulty in finding the place where the bear had gone up, for it was hidden by a big fallen mass of rock. Once they rounded this the ascent was comparatively easy. Ned felt certain that it was the place where the mad Indian had gone up with Ben Bagley, and it was not without some sense of fear that they approached the cave.

"We want to be wide awake now," he whispered. "There's just one thing to do, and that's to shoot that fellow off hand, for if he once gets his grip on any one of us it's good-by."

Ned was thinking of the body of Simon Snedeker lying in the valley. He had made no allusion to it, for he did not want to shock Edith.

Of course he knew more of the danger of their situation than he cared to tell, but for all that he walked boldly on up to the cave.

They came upon it suddenly, a high, narrow opening in the cliff, which seemed to widen out further in.

"Here's the place," said Ned. "Wait a minute, let's listen."

They did, but could hear no sound.

"Ye gods and little fishes! I don't feel much like going in there," said the Unknown, "but I suppose it's got to be."

"That's where the bear went," replied Ned, quietly.

"And your man-bear?"

"Yes, sir. I'm positive of it. I'll go in alone if you say the word."

"I think I hear myself saying it! You never go into that black hole without me, but I do advise that Dick and Edith hold back."

"Never!" exclaimed Edith. "If one goes all go."

Without a word Ned started into the cave, the others following close at his heels.

Before he had advanced a dozen yards he was treated to a surprise.

Rounding a turn of the rocks daylight burst upon them. The cave was no cave but just a tunnel passing through the mountain.

It looked all plain sailing now. They could see the valley of the Klondike right ahead of them.

"Hooray!" cried Ned, forgetting where they were in his excitement, and he was running on, when all at once a giant Indian, with a bearskin thrown over his shoulders, leaped out from among the rocks and planted himself directly in their path, snapping and snarling, showing his teeth like a dog.

"The man-bear!" gasped Ned, and he flung up his rifle and fired.

The Indian jumped two feet off the ground, and with a horrible yell, turned and ran off through the tunnel, disappearing before he had gone ten yards.

"Help! Help! Save me!" cried a dismal voice ahead.

"That's Professor Appledore!" shouted Ned, dashing on.

"Or Ben Bagley," echoed Dick.

They ran on, coming in a moment to a niche in the

wall where they caught sight of a man lying on the ground.

It was the robber chief sure enough.

Tied up hand and foot Ben Bagley lay there calling for help.

Ned sprang to his side and cut him free.

"By Heaven, Young Klondike, I'll never forget you for this!" groaned Bagley. "I was at the mercy of a fiend. Where is he? Look out for yourselves! There's twenty more of them somewhere around."

"Let them all come on, then, I'm going out of here!" cried Ned. "Where's that man who was with you?"

"Poor Sime? Dead I—I reckon! Don't let's lose a minute. We want to go on while there's time."

"No, no! Not him. There was another."

But Ben Bagley evidently knew of no other. His story was that the man-bear had brought him to this place, there tying him up and leaving him. Not a word had been said to him he declared, but he had seen the mad Indian pass and repass several times in company with a big band.

"Get on there and don't talk any more!" cried the Unknown, breaking in upon Ben Bagley's story suddenly. "Young Klondike, we want to be on the move."

"You won't refuse to let me stay with you, gents," whined Bagley. "You know me, Young Klondike. I won't go back on you—never again."

"You won't get the chance," said Ned, as he moved on through the tunnel. "We'll take precious good care of that."

"Lay low!" breathed Dick, whose sharp ears caught suspicious sounds.

He had scarcely spoken when a chorus of wild shouts were heard ahead of them, and fully a dozen Indians sprang out from among the rocks and blocked the way.

"Ugh! Ugh! Pale-faces no pass!" they cried, and they covered Young Klondike's party with bows and arrows, while in front of all the man-bear suddenly sprang into view gesticulating and waving his hands.

CHAPTER XI.

THAT THUNDEROUS NOISE.

"FIRE! Let them have it! We've got to force our way out if we kill them to a man."

Four rifles spoke as Young Klondike shouted these words.

The report was like thunder there in the confined space of the tunnel, which in an instant was filled with smoke.

Wild cries followed the shots. There was a whirl of arrows. Singing past the heads of our friends they flew, and yet did no damage.

"Again!" shouted Ned. "Blaze right ahead! Fire!"

Once more the rifles spoke, the reports echoing and re-echoing back from the rocks with thunderous sound.

Followed by his friends, Young Klondike charged boldly on, coming out on the side of the ridge a moment later.

The enemy had vanished mysteriously as they appeared.

It was a strange and unexpected ending to what appeared likely to prove a sharp fight.

Where the Indians came from, and where they went to was something Ned could only guess at, for they saw no break in the rocks as they ran, and the next two days brought no explanation of the mysterious affair.

It was certainly very strange how suddenly the whole situation was transformed.

Ned Golden and his friends now found themselves in the valley of the Klondike further along on the side of the ridge, but at no great distance from the hut to which they lost no time in returning.

Naturally their adventures were fully discussed, and the rest of that day was spent in waiting for an attack from the Indians.

None came, however, and on the day following it was decided to venture back into the Death Valley, and bring out a load of gold from that wonderful hidden mine.

"You can go or not; you can stay here or you can go away, or in other words you can do just whatever you like," the Unknown said to Ben Bagley, "but don't you dare to bring your gang down upon us! We'll be ready for them if they come."

"Boss," said the robber thief, "don't you think it. I don't forget what Young Klondike did for me. He tried to save my life when it might have cost his own. He did save my life, and I'll be true to him to the last."

So much for gratitude.

Ben Bagley stayed with them, and early that morning all went through the tunnel into Death Valley again.

They saw nothing of the man-bear or the Indians. Everything remained exactly as they had last seen it.

Each one had taken a big bag along, and after burying the body of Simon Snedecker—an act of decency which Ned, Bagley and the Unknown performed alone—they proceeded to fill the bags with the nuggets, and carried them through to the hut.

Ten trips were made that day. The pile of gold at the hut began to grow.

Still there was no alarm nor sign of any one.

Ned ceased to regret the loss of the Golden Eagle. He had found an easier way of working the hidden mine.

"If this keeps on we shall pile up a couple of million here in less than no time," said the Unknown that night. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, Young Klondike, I begin to believe that our hidden mine is the richest in the world."

"Shall we tackle the big nuggets to-morrow?" said Edith.

"We don't need to," replied Ned. "We can do better with the small ones. When the Mic-Mac returns we'll put all hands on to the job and then we can manage it easily, but for the present we'll let it set."

Next day the work continued, Ben Bagley doing his share without a murmur, and by night the pile of gold in the hut was twice as big as it had been before.

That night another storm broke, and from seven o'clock on into the next day the rain fell in torrents.

Our party remained storm-bound until after ten o'clock when it stopped raining, and they determined to go into Death Valley again for another load of gold.

As they passed through the tunnel Ned examined the wall every part of the way, and tried his best to account for the disappearance of the Indians but was entirely unable to do so, for there was apparently no break in the rocks.

"There must be a way in somewhere," declared Dick, "and if we could find that we probably should find out what became of Professor Appledore, but it begins to look rather doubtful if we shall ever be any wiser than we are now."

"I don't know about that," said the Unknown; "if the man is still alive we shall undoubtedly see him again, but when or how, or—ye gods and little fishes! What was that?"

A thunderous noise had suddenly made itself heard. The whole mountain seemed to tremble. They could hear sounds like the cracking of the rocks above them and the ground moved beneath their feet.

"An earthquake!" cried Ned.

"I don't believe it," said the Unknown. "More likely it's a landslide. The rain has loosened up everything. Wait a minute and you'll hear a rush of rocks and earth down into the valley."

But they waited several minutes and nothing of the sort occurred.

"Well, now, my explanation don't explain for a cent," laughed the Unknown. "Perhaps it was an earthquake, although I never heard anything of the sort up here."

They now pushed on into Death Valley, and hurried down the rocks.

"Hello!" cried Ned, suddenly looking down to the level. "What's this? Why, everything's afloat!"

A great change had taken place in the appearance of the valley, although no one had observed it until now.

There was water everywhere. The gold-strewn soil had vanished, and Death Valley had become a lake. Away up at the other end they could see the wreck of the Golden Eagle floating about on the water, whirled around by the wind, which still blew a gale.

"Well, upon my word this is an interesting state of affairs!" cried Edith. "Can the rain have done all this?"

"Most certainly," replied Ned, "and now you understand why everything was washed so clean down

there. No doubt this happens every time there's a big storm. See how the water is running in now."

It was coming down into the valley in a thousand little streams, which rushed over the rocks on both sides.

Any one could see that the water was not yet at its height, nor likely to be for some hours, even if it rained no more.

"Well, that settles our business for the day," said the Unknown. "Of course we can do no mining here."

Someone said something about going back to the hut, but before any one could say anything else or make a move that same thunderous noise was heard again.

If the mountain had been suddenly torn in two it could hardly have been louder.

At the same instant a big boulder, loosened from its resting place, came whirling down the slope.

"Look out! Look out!" yelled the Unknown, for they were directly in its path and no chance to step aside either to the right or to the left.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE HIDDEN MINE.

If it had depended upon Young Klondike and his friends getting out of the way of the boulder all hands would have been dead in just about two seconds of time.

Luckily for them the boulder took a turn and went bounding over the ledge, passing within a foot of them, and they were saved.

Then once more the thunderous noise was heard, and down came two big rocks at a little distance away.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is serious!" cried the Unknown. "It means a landslide! That's what it means. When I was hunting my man among the Himalayer Mountains in '82, I remember just such an occurrence as this. First we heard the cracking noises, and then the whole side of the mountain came tumbling down. Young Klondike, if I may make a suggestion, the best thing we can do is to strike back into the cave as quick as we can get a move on us. If not that, it's my opinion we'll find ourselves paddling about in that water next."

"We'll go back," said Ned. "At the bottom of all your nonsense I'm afraid there's some truth. Great Scott! There comes another stone!"

A big mass of rock came whirling down within twenty feet of them, and still again the cracking sound was heard.

It was plain enough that whatever was going to happen was likely to happen right away, and Ned led off in the rush for the mouth of the tunnel.

Not an instant too soon did they reach it. Scarcely had Ben Bagley passed inside—and he was

the last—when an awful rushing sound was heard above them and with a mighty roar a vast mass of earth and stone went sliding down into Death Valley.

The Unknown's prediction had come true.

A landslide of gigantic proportions had taken place.

The shock was so great that Young Klondike's party went down like a row of nine pins.

Ned found himself on top of Dick, and Dick fell over the Unknown while Edith was thrown against the wall, but Ben Bagley clutched the rocks and managed to keep his feet.

The silence which followed was even more awe-inspiring than the calamity itself.

All scrambled up and stood listening tremblingly, expecting nothing less than the collapse of the whole mountain next.

The cave was now darkened; a great mass of fallen rock, which had lodged on the ledge, choked the entrance; it was a certain thing that no one would ever get into Death Valley that way again.

But they could see around it through the narrow spaces left, and were able to look down into what had been the valley.

Thousands of tons of earth and rocks had tumbled into it, filling it up to a considerable height for its entire length, and hundreds of great trees were mingled with the debris.

Young Klondike saw at a glance that nobody would ever work the hidden mine in Death Valley again.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah the jig is up! Let's get out of here!" cried the Unknown.

It was certainly high time to get back into the valley of the Klondike if they expected to get there at all.

As they hurried on all noticed the increasing darkness and Ned's worst fears were realized when he saw that the other end of the tunnel was also closed.

"Penned! Ye gods and little fishes, penned!" cried the Unknown.

Evidently the landslide had been on both sides of the ridge.

They knew it was so when they came to the end of the tunnel, for it was choked up solid and with no chance of getting out at either end; the situation had become serious indeed.

"What's to be done?" gasped Ben Bagley. "Are we to stay here and die like rats in a trap?"

Before any one could answer, an awful yell rang out further along the tunnel.

Ned recognized it only too well. It was the same old cry of the man-bear.

"The Indians! The Indians!" gasped Bagley. "Oh, what are we to do?"

"Do! Why, we are to stay and show them that we are men and not babies!" cried Edith. "Rifles ready, friends!"

"All ready here!" said Ned.

"And here, too!" added Dick.

"Mine has been ready ever since I came to the Klondike!" cried the Unknown.

They had need of all.

At the same instant the Indians appeared further up the tunnel.

As before, they were headed by the man-bear.

No word was spoken, they took it out in yelling, but right away the arrows began to fly.

Edith fired, so did Ned, so did Dick, so also did the Unknown.

Again the tunnel was filled with smoke and that so suddenly that our friends could not see what damage had been done, but they could hear the Indians rushing on when all at once a man sprang out from behind the rocks directly in their path.

It was Professor Appledore, bare headed, bare footed, as wild looking as the man-bear himself, but it was the man from McGill College nevertheless.

"This way, Young Klondike! This way! I alone can save you!" he cried. "There are a hundred Indians in this mountain and they've sworn to kill you. Follow me, quick!"

Here was an offer of help not to be refused.

Without a word Ned turned in behind the rocks after Professor Appledore.

Here in a little niche, which he had believed to be solid, was a narrow opening just big enough for a man to squeeze through, and through it they all went, and Ben Bagley, who was the last, had no sooner passed it than the professor pushed against a big rock which rested near the opening.

"Help me!" he cried. "Help me here! We can close this passage up."

All hands threw their weight on the rock and it tumbled against the opening, blocking it up completely.

"We are safe enough!" cried Professor Appledore, and so it proved, for he led the way right out on to the ridge by another tunnel, and there lay the hut in plain sight below them.

"You can thank your stars that my life was saved when I went down over that ledge!" he exclaimed. "Look here, this mountain is riddled with these tunnels and the Indians may come down upon us yet."

I've been their prisoner ever since they found me on the ledge where I lay unconscious after that terrible fall; but now when the landslide came they ran off and left me. In groping my way about I heard the firing and you know the rest. Great Heavens! I've had enough of the Klondike. I want to go right back to Montreal."

The sentiments expressed in this somewhat lengthy explanation were precisely those of Young Klondike and his friends.

They, too, had had quite enough of this terrible Death Valley, and while Montreal had no charms for them, they all heartily wished themselves back in Dawson City again.

Oddly enough, as they were hurrying down off the ridge they heard a steamer's whistle and there was the Mic-Mac just coming into the creek.

It was lucky too, for just then the Indians appeared on the top of the ridge, but when they saw the steamer they beat a hasty retreat.

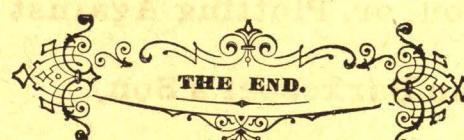
So the whole affair ended right there, and within two hours Young Klondike's party was on their way to Dawson City with over three hundred thousand dollars in gold, snugly packed away.

It was the last they or any one else will probably ever get out of the hidden mine.

It is easy to get down into Death Valley now, but its gold lies buried under twenty feet of rocks and earth.

Ben Bagley went with the rest, and has become a respectable member of society. Young Klondike gave him a claim, and he is working steadily, and declares that he will never engage in any crooked business again. Professor Appledore went back to Montreal.

The loss of the Golden Eagle and the stirring adventures attending it did not serve to keep Ned Golden and his friends quiet. Within a week they were involved in a series of happenings more startling still, which will be found fully described in the next number of this series, entitled "YOUNG KLONDIKE'S TRUMP CARD; OR, THE RUSH TO ROCKY RIVER."



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